

Chapter 16

Female Entrepreneurship and Management in the Immigrant Reception Sector in Italy



Paola Paoloni and Marco Valeri

Abstract The aim of this paper is to verify whether relational capital allows increasing the information inherent in the process of the network of female cooperative micro-enterprises. The focus on Italy is justified on the grounds that the phenomenon of immigration in Italy has become a central theme in the political and social debate. Based on the literature on the subject and on previous research results it is useful to ask the following research question: *does the network affect the competitive advantage of female micro-enterprises operating in the field of immigrant reception in Italy?* To gather data for our study, a qualitative research methodology was adopted using a case study approach based on examining in depth current events of real life (Yin in Case study research: design and methods. Sage Publications, Thousand Oaks, 2009). The survey has involved two enterprises, Formland and Altea, which are two out of the ten business realities committed to immigrants' reception within the area of the Italian region Lazio. The first one is a female-run business, which includes eight reception centers scattered throughout the territory (four in the province of Frosinone, two in the province of Caserta and two in that of Naples), the second one is an entirely female-owned enterprise and counts around forty reception structures. The structure of the interviews reflects the need to examine the personal features of female managers, the organizational aspects and the style of leadership, the task environment in which the enterprise works and the main possible benefits, or obstacles, they might obtain, or face. The paper develops the CAOS model of micro-entrepreneurship, examining the personal characteristics of a female entrepreneur (C), the environment in which a micro-enterprise operates (A), organizational and managerial aspects (O) and the motivations for starting a new business (S). Using this model, the authors are able to correlate these factors, classify different types of connections, and to identify the

P. Paoloni · M. Valeri (✉)

Faculty of Economics, Niccolò Cusano University, Via Don Gnocchi 3, Rome, Italy
e-mail: marco.valeri@unicusano.it

P. Paoloni

e-mail: paola.paoloni@uniroma1.it

© Springer Nature Switzerland AG 2019

P. Paoloni and R. Lombardi (eds.), *Advances in Gender and Cultural Research in Business and Economics*, Springer Proceedings in Business and Economics, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-00335-7_16

237

kind of existing relationships. The analysis shows a predominant use of networks characterized by informal and permanent relationships, supporting the need to reconcile work and family and to involve relatives and friends in the network. This emphasizes the lack of strategy in the female-run micro-enterprises. Given that female management is regarded as central to the development and welfare of economies, deepening the knowledge of how women managers lead business can contribute to improving the effectiveness of policies aimed at promoting the participation of female managers in the economy.

Keywords Relational capital · Entrepreneurship · Organizational behavior
Network · Women in management · Competitive advantage

16.1 Introduction

In recent years, women have been the protagonists of an economic and social phenomenon that has dramatically changed the working environment: firsthand recruitment of the role of entrepreneur. This is a trend that has involved both Western and developing countries, gaining an increasing importance. To such an evolution, however, an equivalent development in literature is not paid.

The studies focused mainly on trying to understand whether women were a real resource for the potential competitive advantages, direction, organization and internal and external relationships of the company. It is currently widely felt that female entrepreneurial experience is characterized by a networking approach, where great importance is attributed to the relational dimension. It also emphasizes the tendency of entrepreneurs to integrate the professional-working dimension into private and family-based, and from this point of view, there are profound differences in the attitudes of entrepreneurs, more orientated to the separation between the various spheres of their own life. However, in women's entrepreneurship studies, the analysis focused on the networks women entrepreneurs create, their composition, the identity and characteristics of the subjects involved the role of the latter in relation to the management of the company and their ability to influence their performance.

Therefore, attention is focused on an important intangible business: the relational capital. The latter in women's businesses is the form of formal or informal, temporary or permanent relationships, which are part of the woman entrepreneur's business and can facilitate access to basic resources for the company's performance.

Therefore, on the basis of the literature on this subject, it is useful to ask the following research question: *does the network affect the competitive advantage of female micro-enterprises operating in the field of immigrant reception in Italy?*

The paper is articulated in two parts. In the first part of the paper, we propose the systematization of the literature on the issues related to the relational capital for the company's performance. The second part is devoted to the analysis of the results of

the survey conducted through the submission of a questionnaire to two significant female entrepreneurial realities operating in the immigrant reception sector in Italy. The paper concludes by promoting the need to activate strategic relationships with all actors involved in the business process to strengthen the competitiveness of the firms.

16.2 Framework

In management literature, the theme of relational capital is dealt with in many ways. Some authoritative scholars point out the economic impact, which may have the relationships of a company included in a specific territorial socio-economic context, others focus on the study of the communication-relational processes of the individual subjects/entities included in a group/network, others focus their attention on the dependent and independent variables that characterize corporate relationships.

Despite this, today we have not yet reached a univocal definition (Porter 1998) especially for two reasons: (a) relational capital is part of a set of goods (intangible) connoted by the main feature of immateriality, the indeterminacy that affects their relative definition and evaluation, (b) relational capital presents unpredictable, non-measurable and non-standardizable variables such as trust, reliability, competence, and the syntony of objectives and interests.

In general, “relational capital” can be defined as the sum of all the advantages that derive from the position held within a network of relationships or from the rights that derive from belonging to a network (Bourdieu 1986).

With reference to this latter aspect, over the last few years, studies on capital relations have focused on three main strands (Paoloni 2011), such as:

1. *the micro approach*, i.e. studies aimed at analyzing the relationships existing between individuals who, through communicative, collaborative and commercial exchanges, generate economic resources (Coleman 1998). In this sense, relational capital is conceived as an individual resource, even if created by the collective action of subjects belonging to a network;
2. *the macro approach*, i.e. studies focusing on the economic impact of business relationships with the actors in the territory in which it operates (Bourdieu 1986; Glaeser et al. 2000; Paldam 2000; Putnam 2000). Relationships are characterized by attributes possessing a subject/entity, inserted in a given geographical context, which can be acquired through certain actions and transformed over time into economic capital. In the macro approach, relational capital is conceived as a social resource contextualized within a socioeconomic and territorial network;
3. *managerial approach*, i.e. studies aimed at deepening the impact of trust and confidence, inherent in the immaterial part of relational capital, on economic performance (Williamson 1993; Glaeser et al. 2000; Nooteboom 2002) on the

ability to increase the economic value of an enterprise, and at times to assume the importance and effectiveness of informal, inter-enterprise, complementary, formal-based control mechanisms (Corsi 2003). In this respect, trust is seen as an expectation that a subject with whom a relationship is established behaves correctly with respect to what is agreed (Das 1989).

With particular reference to the *managerial approach*, trust relationships have a different degree of intensity that can also be time-varying, creating a structured process that sees the intensity of trust and therefore relationship (Tarrow 2000). Trust as an incremental factor in relationships is understood by some Authors as a knowledge-based factor (Gulati 1995), which is fueled by increasing the number of contacts among the subjects on the network, thus gaining experience with respect to behaviors and partner reactions, so as to develop emotional and psychological bonds of trust (Sako 1992; Gatti 1999; Adler 2001).

The *managerial approach*, therefore, focuses on analyzing relational capital by analyzing current or potential trust and confidence from activated business relationships.

It is consolidated in the literature that the achievement of competitive advantage depends on the ability to engage with the environment in which the company operates. Through the network, in fact, it is easier to access to supply, outlet markets, financial markets, and interact with all the actors who populate the environment.

All stakeholders and not just customers have an interest in interweaving relationships with the enterprise and, in the case of small and medium-sized businesses, the relationship between the environment and the entrepreneur-owner (a network of friends, parental, professional, confidential). Various types of networks are activated by companies that differ according to the types of goals to be pursued. Among the multiple classifications that may affect relationships (geographical, economic-sectoral, etc.), we focus on what characterizes the relationship typology with the different subjects involved.

In general, relationships can be classified into *formal and informal relationships*.

Formal relationships are characterized by the presence of a need/need or a legal obligation (e.g. the relationship that binds the company to the financial administration), managerial (e.g. the relationship that binds the company with consultants, professionals, trade associations), economic (e.g. the relationship that binds the company with customers, suppliers, lenders).

Informal relationships, on the other hand, are often avoided by any kind of economic logic, but they arise and strengthen by indirectly providing support and business support and/or entrepreneurship at various stages in the life of the company. They are not characterized by constraints but personal or family choices that involve involvement, first, between the person-company and the stakeholders and, consequently, between the latter and the company as an economic entity.

In addition, relationships can be classified according to the frequency with which the relationship is activated and consequently their degree of solidity. Relationships can be classified into *permanent relationships* and *temporary relationships*.

Permanent relationships imply the existence of a lasting, long-lasting relationship, consolidated by trust and confidence. The solidity of a permanent relationship, in terms of repeat relationships, is proof of the appreciation of the relationship by both in the name of mutual economic benefit and the existence of a shared choice leading to a loyalty path with the stakeholder.

Temporary or circumstantial relationships, however, are characterized by occasional relationships, exchanges or confidences, not accompanied by trust and well-being, but from unfulfilled expectations and therefore interrupted at birth or within a short time.

Despite the acknowledged importance of the strategic potential of the relationships found in recent studies (Larson and Starr 1993; Hoang and Antonic 2003; Ozgen and Baron 2007) empirical research that focused attention on them. Recent studies have focused on the differences between relationships, built by women managers and those activated by men managers, finding differences in both composition and use (Carsrud et al. 1986; Rodriguez and Santos 2009).

There are numerous differences in morphology and size, noting that the women-activated women's network is formed by a greater female component than male and tend to be small. Few subjects, therefore, and with a prevalent percentage of women. However, it is difficult to see a standardized network model, few are the studies on this and too heterogeneous the topic being considered. It is, however, agreed (Gillian 1982; Shapero and Sokol 1982) that the women-led enterprise is characterized by the frequent use, during all phases of the business life cycle, of connections and networks of a cooperative nature rather than being propagated to atomistic management, which is instead seen as a characteristic of male firms, predisposed to a generally distinct separation between family, social and work sphere. This difference finds its foundation in the different ways of being and living the personal and professional sphere of men and women. The idea of the network for women is precisely the creation of a necessary link between work, family, and community (Aldric 1989), which often coincides with the main motivation of doing business.

The woman manager tends to form an enterprise network composed of few subjects and preferably of female gender (Smeltzer and Fann 1989; Lerner and Almor 2002). The use of the network is recurring during all phases of company life, especially during start-up (Mazzarol et al. 1999), and becomes the main tool for achieving the 'aim of reconciliation between work and family.

In the paper, we propose to analyze this particular type of network to understand whether the relationships that it comprises have been activated to meet the specific needs of enterprises and whether achieving them can offer to managers greater firm stability and better organizational performance, both managerial and relational.

16.3 Migrant Emergency in Europe and Italy: Some Considerations

For more than three years, the European Union is facing a migratory crisis characterized by a strong growth in irregular immigrants seeking asylum. It is no surprise, then, that this crisis has entered the European political agenda and the individual member states. According to data from the European Border and Coast Guard (European Border and Coast Guard Agency—Frontex 2017), which collects data on illegal crossings at the borders of the European Union, there were over 2.6 million accesses of irregular foreigners registered between 2014 and 2016 (Ballatore et al. 2017).

During the period under consideration, irregular migratory pressure towards the EU was manifested mainly through four routes: that of the central Mediterranean, which identifies sea-going flows from the coasts of Libya, Egypt, Algeria and Tunisia mainly to Italy; the Eastern Mediterranean route, i.e. entry into Greece from Turkey and Egypt; the path of the western Mediterranean, that is, the one that leads from Algeria to Spain and the route from Albania to Greece. To these is added that of the Western Balkans, which collects the irregular secondary crossings, i.e. those of immigrants who have already entered Greece and headed to Hungary through the Macedonia-Serbia corridor. Between 2014 and 2016, the Eastern Mediterranean route represented, with over 40% of the total entry, the main access route for irregular foreigners to the European Union, along with that of the Central Mediterranean. In the three-year period, the map of illegal migration flows has been modified several times.

The migratory pressure on Italy, through the Central Mediterranean route, has intensified since 2011, in connection with the geopolitical tensions in North African countries, and has peaked in 2014, when irregular entries in Italy have reached the maximum in the historical comparison (about 170,000). In that year, over 60% of the total illegal crossings in the European Union took place through this route. In 2015, in contrast, the entry into Italy was attenuated and the migratory pressure on Greece greatly increased: with more than 885,000 arrivals, about 50,000 of 2014, the Eastern Mediterranean route reached about 49% of irregular entrances in EU.

16.4 The Research Methodology

From a methodology perspective the survey has involved two companies operating in the immigrant reception sector in the Italian region Lazio: Formland and Altea, that are 2 out of the 10 entrepreneurial realities involved in immigrants reception in the Italian region Lazio. The first case study is about Formland, a female-run cooperative enterprise as the General Manager is a young woman manager. This is a significant entrepreneurial reality consisting of eight reception centers so located on the territory: 4 reception centers in the province of

Frosinone, two reception centers in the province of Caserta and two reception centers in the province of Naples (Marigliano and Bosco Reale) for a total of 480 guests mainly from Nigerian, Ivory Coast, Bangladesh and Pakistan nationality. The second case study is about a female-owned business which counts around 40 reception structures located in the towns of Alatri, Frosinone, Ferentino and Ceccano, hosting an average of 120 guests each, coming mainly from Nigeria, Ivory Coast, Bangladesh and Pakistan. A distinctive trait of this enterprise is the low percentage of men among the employees. It is possible to count only five male employees.

The survey was carried out through a questionnaire to the General Manager of the Formland firm and to the owner of the Altea firm in September 2017. The questionnaire was administered through two in-depth interviews with the General Manager in order to answer all the questions in the questionnaire.

The questionnaire was the result of a re-elaboration of our previous surveys and adapted to the research question paper (Paoloni 2011; Paoloni et al. 2017a) was structured in a battery of open questions aimed at analyzing the distinctive factors of the enterprise being investigated. They can be summarized in the following ways:

1. the personal characteristics of the female manager;
2. the organizational aspects and directional style;
3. the specific environment in which the enterprise operates;
4. the potentials of the activated network.

During the direct interview, the interviewees had the freedom to describe the company's performance and had the opportunity to deepen specific topics that characterize their managerial experience. The aspects of the analysis that are analyzed in the questionnaire are the result of the pursuit of previous research carried out in recent years on female entrepreneurship (Paoloni and Valeri 2017; Paoloni et al. 2017a, b).

16.5 Results

The survey carried out analyzed the typical factors of a female-based and of a female-owned enterprises, both operating in the field of immigrant reception in Italy, with particular reference to (1) personal characteristics of the entrepreneur, (2) organizational aspects and management style, (3) the specific environment in which the company operates and (4) the potential of the activated network.

These factors will be addressed and analyzed in the light of statements made by entrepreneurs interviewed to investigate the use of micro and small-scale women's businesses operating in the field of immigrant reception in Italy condition their competitive advantage.

16.5.1 *Formland Case Study*

16.5.1.1 The Identikit of the Woman-Manager Interviewed

The survey allowed us to understand the peculiar characteristics of female entrepreneurs operating in the field of immigrant reception in Italy, with particular reference to Lazio Region.

Regarding origins and registry, the manager interviewed is a 35 years-old woman who was born in Naples, graduated in Political Sciences and International Development and Cooperation. She is the manager of a cooperative called Formland: for more than fifteen years, she has been working to welcome thousands of immigrants landed to Italian coasts because of international agreements between European countries.

Formland is composed by eight reception centers scattered throughout the territory as follows: 4 of them are near to Frosinone, two centers are located near to Caserta and the remaining ones are located near Naples (Marigliano and Bosco Reale). On average, each host center hosts about 60 guests (most of them are men; the total number is 480 guests) mainly of Nigerian, Cote d'Ivoire, Bangladesh, Pakistanian nationalities.

As soon as I was employed in Formland, I was entrusted with the responsibility of a small reception center near Naples. In just two years I grew from head of structure to general manager, gained the confidence of the property to the point that they entrusted me again with the delicate task of maintaining relationships with Prefecture, local administration and Lazio Region.

From the relational point of view, the interviewed woman showed a strong collaboration within the enterprise, not only among employees but also among employees and management.

I really do believe in cooperation with both men and women because they are both responsible and reliable. Especially during the hardest moments of immigrants landing, they both work efficiently.

16.5.1.2 Organizational Aspects and Directional Style

Regarding organization, Formland has a functional organizational structure that provides the following roles and responsibility: a President, a General Manager, 8 function managers each of which responds to a welcoming center manager and finally a cultural mediator of Libyan origin. The staff area is composed of some offices, such as purchases office, law office, human resources office and accounting.

These offices are deemed necessary to the conduct of the business. There are many operators working 24 h a day in each reception center, taking care of guests. Formland has 40 employees in total, of which 5 are women.

Regarding the leadership style adopted by the interviewed manager, it seems complex and heterogeneous, due to the many intervening factors: different motivations, different strategic path to activate, many different careers, different personal and professional experiences deeply affect human growth. Even if the company tends to rely on the network, to consult and involve people in the in business management, the decision-making process is truly shared.

The manager we have interviewed tends to favor participation of whom is able to support the decisions in an emotional or professional way, even if the decision has been already made or strongly addressed.

The relation between property and the various heads of reception centers is not direct. Therefore, because every strategic decision of the property passes through me, I exactly know the mood of employees and I know their needs. It's not easy for me to formalize perfectly what the President decides, but I have to be honest: most of the times I achieved success.

16.5.1.3 The Enterprise's Task Environment

Our investigation shows that the most complicated relationships between the enterprise and the environment are those related to financial funds, to the lack of a proper entrepreneurship and managerial culture due to the particularity of the operating sector.

In particular, the networks activated by the manager interviewed are all cooperative, networks activated and aimed at mutual, non-competitive collaboration, established in the perspective of reception and cooperation.

However, the role of trade associations is greatly appreciated by our manager, and it represents a point of reference in order to find information and orientation, with the aim to get support in requesting data, financial fundings (like that intended for women's businesses), to obtain useful information on the surrounding economic environment, or to rely on for emergencies or states of need.

We try to build relationships with local institutions and other local realities conceived as a basin of suppliers of goods and services in every location where we have a reception center because they host us and we don't want to be perceived as "predators". Regarding the relationship with the institutions, the first step should be done by the local Prefecture, which should communicate to majors the incoming of immigrants, who will become guests of reception structures in the area. Therefore, considering the delicacy of the business, we prefer to involve local actors and local staff.

Exchanges with the surrounding environment mainly take place to guarantee the integration of guests with the host territory. Sometimes these relationships are flanked by others, both formal (professionals, institutions, consultants) and informal (friends, family), which participate and support the activity of the company in various ways.

We are not always perceived in the same way in the different places where we work. For example, in Cassino, we have not been frowned upon and we have been hardly criticized to the point that the TV Show “Quinta Colonna” (October 2016) decided to study our situation, to understand the causes of this rough relationship with the local community. Certainly, there was a lack of communication from the local institutions towards the inhabitants.

16.5.1.4 The Potential of the Activated Network

In management literature, the phenomenon of network has become a central theme in the national and international scientific debate. The advantage of networks lies in their ability to build cooperation and coordination relationships (Grandori and Soda 1995), to mix unique competences and resources (Eisenhardt and Schoonhoven 1996) and to favor the joint processes of production and distribution of goods/services (Gulati 1998).

Through the sharing of resources and knowledge, being part of a network allows firms to overcome small and medium size limitations that hinder the development of enterprises in some economic sectors.

In organizational literature, the idea of network has been analysed focusing on inter-organizational relationships potential.

In particular, these studies provided arguments on causes and benefits concerning their creation and implementation (Lipparini and Lorenzoni 2000; Grandori and Giordani 2011), focusing on cooperative and competitive strategies that the network’s participants activate on the rules of behavior, on the levels of institutionalization of the network, on power relations and on variation of this variables over time.

Network is an indispensable tool for sharing information, competencies and projects. It is fundamental to grow and to solve economic issues that never abandon us. In fact, ATI was born for this: there is already a more solid economic reality on the territory which could interact with smaller firms and their competencies.

Local and governmental Institutions with which the company interacts for the immigrants hosting activity compose the external network.

We have built formal and informal relations with local actors. Most of them are informal, except for the official relationships with Institutions and with ATI. Generally, these are short-term relationships, because they are linked to specific activities.

Certainly, many things are going to change. This business sector will not disappear because of the cyclic nature of migratory flows and of the strategic position of Italy in the Mediterranean area. Despite this, there will be more selection in the managing the reception of immigrants made by institutions. In this peculiar field, the women ability to be sensitive managers may be the key to make a leap of quality. Women are more sensitive than men and in the fragile need to communicate with immigrant guests they manage to achieve great results.

In recent years there have been numerous influx of immigrants, several times in a day too so many companies and associations have made efforts to work in this area. Now that the emergency has diminished (the landings have decreased), there will be a process of natural selection and only those companies that will be able to seriously guarantee integration services will survive.

16.5.2 Altea Case Study

16.5.2.1 The Identikit of the Businesswoman Interviewed

The survey has showed the features of the typical businesswoman operating in the immigrant reception sector within the Italian Region Lazio.

Regarding her origins and registry, the businesswoman is Sabina Bonifazi, 42 years old, born in the town of Frosinone. She is married, has a daughter and a bachelor's degree in Education.

Altea cooperative was founded in 2010 even though I have been nurturing my entrepreneurial project since I was 20 years old, that is still a university student. My academic studies and all my previous and current work experiences are socially oriented with particular attention to the issues of specific social groups such as detainees, drug addicts and immigrants.

Despite the launch of the entrepreneurial activity dates back to 2010, the kick-off to the activities of immigrants reception took place in 2011, when the emergency of immigrants coming from north-Africa outbroke.

Altea arises from the will to achieve what I've always wanted to do, which was being a social worker. It was hard to find the initial funding. Altea was developed with the help of neither any network, nor with that of professional agencies or other similar entities to support its start up stage. It wasn't easy to obtain loans form credit institutions as we were total strangers to them and they could not trust us. For this reason, I had to use my personal financial resources. However, over time the initial difficulties we had to access credit have decreased as the trust toward myself and my cooperative has grown.

Altea cooperative is composed of about 40 hosting structures located in the towns of Alatri, Frosinone, Ferentino and Ceccano. They host an average of 120 guests each (mostly men for a total of about 4800 guests), coming mainly from Nigeria, Ivory Coast, Bangladesh and Pakistan.

From a professional perspective, the identikit of the interviewed businesswoman immediately points out an innovative ability leaning toward a continuous exploration attitude, typical of a dynamic mindset. This is determined by both the responsibility of the position of the interviewee within the business and by the peculiarity of the field in which she operates.

From a relational point of view, the interview has highlighted a strong sense of cooperation inside the company, with employees acknowledging her role of guidance.

Despite my being the entrepreneur, this is just recognised on paper, because only a small part of my day to day work is dedicated to the administrative or representation activities. Actually, I spend the largest part of my time on the field in close contact with immigrants. I am an entrepreneur, but at the same time I tend to act more as a manager because it is necessary to have everything under control, considering the sensitivity nature of this activity.

The motivation

Passion is such a distinctive element of this job that it can justify the sacrifice of time stolen from one's personal private life.

Once I finished my studies, I started deepening my knowledge of the tertiary sector as a social worker. Over time, I realized that I needed to achieve what was important to me, that is to say developing my personal entrepreneurial project. All started after a talk with two of my colleagues, who at that time were also interested in developing a business and to whom I had presented my entrepreneurial idea.

My main goal is not achieving a financial result, but instead to be able to put people - who in this specific case are the immigrants - at the heart of the system, trying to actively contribute to their well-being and supporting their integration in the territory.

16.5.2.2 Organizational Aspects and Managerial Style

As far as the organization is concerned, Altea has a functional organizational structure with the following roles and responsibilities: a President, a General Manager, and a number of functions leaders each of whom manage an immigrant reception center. The staff area is instead composed of some functional units, such as purchasing, legal, human resources and accounting. These units are considered essential to the development of the business activities. As of today, Altea has 20 employees, of whom only 5 male, 2 interns and 3 professionals.

The choice to employ more women than men is drawn by the assumption that women are more suitable for this kind of jobs. Why? On one hand, men seem less interested in this sector, while on the other hand, thanks to their feminine instinct, women show a different and more suitable attitude towards the reception of immigrants. Compared to men, women can better combine the role of educator with those of caretaker and manager. On the contrary, men seem to lack in the ability to welcome and listen: all abilities that, working in this particular field, are essential. Indeed those competences convey more serenity and respect of rules. Women can create and manage a relation with refugees with a different approach.

Regarding the style of direction chosen by the interviewed woman entrepreneur, there is a tendency to create a network with the employees, consulting and supporting their involvement in the business management.

I don't have a bossy attitude towards my employees, to the point that it isn't possible to feel a distance between them and myself. I manage to give guidelines and, at the same time, they respect me because I share their working environment. Nevertheless sometimes is necessary to be authoritative. Naturally, without losing sight of the sharing aspect, because I believe that being close to employees at all levels doesn't undermine my role of entrepreneur. Rather, it helps create a peaceful working environment.

In the decisional process, the interviewed woman entrepreneur tends to favour the participation of whoever can give an emotional or professional support to a decision, whether it has already been made or strongly addressed.

It depends on what kind of decisions has to be made. If a decision has to be made immediately, it is obvious that I am the one who makes it. Otherwise, all choices are shared with all employees, considering the sensitivity of the cooperative activity. Debating is a daily activity.

16.5.2.3 The Enterprise Operating Environment

The survey shows that the relationships that the business develops with the surrounding environment aim above all to guarantee a stronger integration of the immigrants with the recipient territory. Sometimes these relationships are supported by other stakeholders, both formal (professionals, consultants, institutions) and informal (friends, relatives) that support the activity of the business in various ways.

In this point in time, we find it difficult to let people understand our job. When we open one of our reception centers for the first time in a new location, people show a sense of disorientation. They show a sort of resistance towards us. However, over the years, I've learned that this kind of resistance is not connected to racism but to a lack of information. It is possible to overcome this resistance over time, even if with some difficulties. Women have an important role in this sense. Why? Because when people learn that the reception of immigrants will be carried out by women firsthand, they seem to be reassured.

The interviewee recognizes the territory as a potentially significant variable to the development of women's job and careers, although it is still perceived as a limit to the activity of the business.

Talking about the interaction with the surrounding environment, if we take the case of an old lady who needs to move some furniture, she would easily ask for the immigrants help. Viceversa, when the active participation of immigrants on the territory is needed by the environment framework, it is not as easy.

For example, the development of projects for the maintenance of green areas in the city hosting the reception centers struggles to succeed, because local institutions are not willing to network with immigrants and let them contribute to the environment that hosts them. There is no collaboration between the reception centers and the municipalities, which show no interest in involving and integrating immigrants in their territory.

16.5.2.4 The Potential of the Activated Network

Being part of a network allows overcoming the limits due to the micro or small dimensions that can prevent the development of enterprises. Network is an essential tool for the exchange of information, competences and sharing of planning activities. It is essential to grow and solve the numerous economic issues that are always around the corner.

Over time Altea has managed with a great effort to create its network of suppliers (of every kind). The network has been developed involving local stakeholders working on the territories of our reception centers. Creating this network has been a tough job. Currently, what is the prevailing kind of network? Considering my professional background, I tend to have formal relationships with all suppliers and above all with Institutions. In fact, I believe that personal aspects should remain separate from the working environment. The building process of our network is still in progress. Now, we are initiating relationships with parishes, Confartigianato (Italian association of artisans and small businesses) and other entities. Actually, I believe that without a network it is impossible to carry out this kind of activity. Therefore, the stronger is the network, the easier will be reaching our goals.

Future prospects for development

I hope that in the future men will play a more active role in this sector thus giving their significant contribution. In addition, I hope we will not be transformed into bureaucrats as it is happening now and that institutions will give us the chance to take increasingly care of the wellbeing of our guests. And above all, I hope that there will be more clarity about how the reception system of immigrants in Italy will work in the near future, because as of today there are still some very unclear aspects.

16.6 Discussion

The aim of this paper is to verify whether relational capital allows increasing the information inherent in the process of the network of female micro-enterprises. The focus on Italy is justified on the grounds that the phenomenon of immigration in Italy has become a central theme in the political and social debate. Based on the literature on the subject and on previous research results it is useful to ask the following research question: *does the network affect the competitive advantage of female micro-enterprises operating in the field of immigrant reception in Italy?*

Tables 16.1 and 16.2 represent a summary of the results. The first column shows the demographic data of the micro-enterprise, while the second includes details referring to the manager and micro-entrepreneur, indicating the extrinsic characteristics of the enterprise. The third column (C) describes the manager and micro-entrepreneur in terms of motivation, her management style, her role within the enterprise and how the decision-making processes are implemented. The fourth column (A) summarises the macro-condition business factors, represented by the “environment”, and answers the question of where the enterprise operates. The fifth column (O) shows how the manager and micro-entrepreneur acts, how she decides to organise the resources. The sixth column (S) is the time element, when the observation of the networks takes place.

From the analysis of the results emerges that, regardless of the age, the manager interviewed looks at his activity as an instrument for self-realization and the possibility of integration between a personal and professional world of a woman.

The motivation that led the interviewee to manage the Formland enterprise is closely related to the period the entrepreneur crosses through her personal, family

Table 16.1 Summary table of data collected Altea case study

Enterprise details		C	A	O	S
Company name: <i>Formiland</i>	Woman entrepreneur Name: Simona	Motivation: self-realization and emotional need	Exchanges with surrounding environment: networks activated with a view to reception and cooperation (both formal and informal)	Goal: meeting guests' needs	Business idea: a passion achieved thanks to an opportunity that has arisen
Legal form: social co-operative	Age: 35	Management style: participatory and rational	Environment needs: integration and security	Profit: not primarily	Initial capital: personal savings and friends' loans
Sector: immigrants' reception	Marital status: single	Role: general manager	Development opportunities: yes, in terms of dimensions and diversification	Functions, roles and responsibilities: president, general manager, 8 function leaders, and a cultural mediator	Major difficulties: raising capital
Number of employees: 10	Children: none	Decision-making process: decentralised			
Number of reception centers: 8	Educational qualification: degree in political sciences				
Number of guests: about 480	Previous experience: none				
Guests' provenance: Nigeria, Bangladesh, Pakistan					
Year of foundation: 2003					
Operating premises: Lazio and Campania regions					

Table 16.2 Summary table of data collected Formland case study

Enterprise details		C	A	O	S
Company name: Altea	Woman manager Name: Simona	Motivation: self-realization and desire to work closely with prisoners, addicts and immigrants	Exchanges with surrounding environment: networks activated with a view to reception and cooperation (both formal and informal)	Goal: to be able to put immigrants at the heart of the system, while supporting their integration	Business idea: product of a dialogue with other two colleagues with whom she had shared her business idea
Legal form: social co-operative	Age: 42	Management style: participatory and authoritative	Environment needs: integration, security and information about reception centers	Profit: not primarily	Initial capital: personal savings and friends' loans
Sector: immigrants' reception	Marital status: married	Role: owner	Development opportunities: yes, in terms of dimensions and diversification	Functions, roles and responsibilities: president, general manager, 18 function leaders, and a cultural mediator.	Major difficulties: raising capital
Number of employees: 20, of which 18 women	Children: yes	Decision-making process: both centralised and decentralised			
Number of reception centers: 40	Educational qualification: degree in pedagogy				
Number of guests: about 4800	Previous experience: yes				
Guests' provenance: Nigeria, Bangladesh, Pakistan					
Year of foundation: 2011					
Operating premises: Lazio and Campania regions					

and affective life. Self-realization and economic independence are the prevailing reasons, but they also add to the satisfaction of emotional needs arising from a change of personal life, a challenge with herself. Having assumed the role of General Manager at the age of 35, it represents a means of communicating outwardly to one's way of being, which is manifested through the personalization of activity and the activation of numerous contacts and relationships. Differently, in the case of Altea enterprise, the woman-entrepreneur was motivated by the necessity to orient her professional work towards social activities, with particular attention to specific troublesome categories as detainees, drug addicts and immigrants.

As far as the decision making process is concerned, both interviewees share the need to support a participatory approach. Actually, despite the peculiarity of those micro enterprise managers who accept or decide to limit dimensions of their business in order to preserve their personal leadership, in the case studies under examination, participation is performed by bringing into play all information and relationships of their personal sphere. By doing so, they start outlining a first network with a supporting function, able to recreate the confidence, the safety and the warmth typical of a familiar context. This is a management style based on communication and improvisation, on intuition and managerial creativity, that is to say a very informal approach of managing a business, which affects both external relations and the internal organization.

In the reality of the most advanced small businesses, intent on developing and growing, triggers a more active relational process by involving many individuals in the company's interests in various ways interested in the enterprise. In some cases, the permanent mismatch between ownership, control, and operational-operational functions may lead to the inadequacy of fundamentals in the objective evaluation of management effectiveness. Operational competence should be complemented by a strategic competence involving long-term vision-oriented risk management and change management. This strategic behavior, on the other hand, is often replaced by flexible management, based on cooperative and interactive relationships that tend to stabilize becoming informal and permanent.

During the interviews, it emerged that the two women, having the position of General Director and entrepreneur respectively, are all-around professionals. Actually, not only do they take care of every single task but also of the supervision of the project. Such activities require a particular attention towards the quality of relations and network, because of the need of having constant communication and exchanges with the surrounding environment, in particular through informal relationships.

In carrying out their business activity, they try to fulfill their existence, creating useful and profitable relationships, under not only the professional aspect, e.g. related to a possible growth of the business, but also linked to increasing their personal connections. It often happens that a friend, who is also a lawyer, becomes the company lawyer, or that a company's supplier becomes a friend of the General Director and of the President.

Even when assigning positions and responsibilities, there is never a clear dividing line, as the interviewed women state that they are willing to perform all kinds of tasks. The relationship with employees is always informal and based on enhancement of cooperation and trust aspects, on flexibility and sharing of responsibility.

The most difficult relationships among female-enterprises and the surrounding environment are those related to finding financial resources in the start-up stage, to the lack of an adequate managerial training and to a widespread underestimation of the entrepreneurial aspects of the business activity.

Taking into account all the above, being a woman makes no key difference with being a man. What really makes the difference are relationships and networks activated with the surrounding environment. Networks activated by the interviewed woman entrepreneur are all based on cooperation, are non-competitive, built according to a hosting perspective and with a "There's room for everyone" attitude.

Enterprises believe that these realities should represent a reference point for information and directions, whereas in practice they are nothing more than a compulsory step to be made in order to find support when asking for information, funds or to gather details about the surrounding economic environment. At the end of the day, they are entities to be contacted only for emergencies or situations of need.

In view of the future development of the business, it emerged that this is a sector of activity that will not disappear because migration flows are cyclical and Italy is in a strategic position in the Mediterranean sea. Nevertheless, there will be more selection among the holders of hosting centers. In this particular sector, the sensitivity of women entrepreneurs and managers could be the turning point for a leap in quality. Women have a different sensibility than men and even in the ability to communicate to guests achieve greater results considering the delicacy of the activity.

In addition, it was interesting to analyze the organizational structure of the company investigated despite being a small-scale enterprise. This made it possible to verify the internal structure and organization by examining, where possible, the relationship between the enterprise and the employee as a major factor influencing the network type. The structured organizational style is geared towards the growth of the employee who sees the general manager as his guide. In the company, all employees aim to ensure a good reception for immigrants who are destined to their own structure but above all to achieve full integration by all immigrants in the area of operation.

The network plays a very important role in conducting immigrant reception. The links with the institutions and with all the local actors are decisive in favoring the integration of the hosts of the structures in the territories in which they have been built. The predominantly used network consists of informal and temporary relationships. The need that this network satisfies is primarily directed at the institutional and economic support the General Manager must consider for carrying out the business. These are relations that stimulate the courage of the general manager and support the push for self-realization. In this way, the general manager succeeds

in not only gaining strength and security in the choices made but also in reconciling her personal and professional sphere with her main needs as a woman manager.

16.7 Conclusion and Limits

Does the network affect the competitive advantage of female micro-enterprises operating in the field of immigrant reception in Italy?

Relational capital is certainly one of the main elements of intellectual capital and is fundamental for all companies in terms of performance measurement; for small ones, in which this measurement is useless and too burdensome, on the other hand, it is important to know the composition of the network, the morphology and the prevailing use. These characteristics are closely linked to the needs of the economic entity and contribute to their satisfaction on which entrepreneurial success depends. The knowledge of the structure of the networks allows to better understand the needs of the entrepreneur and to arrive at the elaboration of specific indicators. In this way, the recurring needs of start-up entrepreneurs and the type of contribution received from established relationships can be more precisely defined.

This study may represent both a preliminary phase of a subsequent development of the intangible approach and may lead to the modeling of management and measurement of intellectual capital—and a single analysis of the network structure, aimed at revealing the qualitative aspect of capital relational. In recent years, many study and research activities have developed on the theme for the importance of the definition, measurement and communication (internal and external) of these resources; in particular, we took care to analyze the intangible sources of value generation of intangible assets and intellectual capital. It could be interesting, therefore, to implement this further type of approach and evaluate the possibility of constructing performance indicators of relational capital for small and medium-sized enterprises, reviewing the cases analyzed and extending to a reasoned and significant sample, the study of relational capital.

The intent of the paper is to increase the information inherent in the process of the network of female micro businesses, in which the use of the network can affect other variables (such as objectives, motivation, socio-cultural environment linked to company performance).

In a future research perspective, it will be necessary to further analyze the aspects related to: (a) gender, with the aim of investigating the differences between male and female companies, both within micro and small businesses and including bigger businesses in the research, thus verifying the model on enterprises of different gender and sizes for a more accurate comparison; (b) company intangibles and, in particular, relational capital, through the use of an “inside out Intangible approach” so as to trace the factors of the CAOS model and connect them with ad hoc indicators that may allow to measure and manage them over time.

References

- Adler, P. S. (2001). Fiducia riflessiva ed economia della conoscenza. *Sviluppo e organizzazione*, 188.
- Aldric, H. (1989). Networking among women entrepreneurs. In O. Hagan, C. Rivchun, & D. Sexton (Eds.), *Women-owned businesses*. New York: Preger.
- Ballatore, R. M., Grompone, A., Lucci, L., Passiglia, P., & Sechi, A. (2017). *I rifugiati e i richiedenti asilo in Italia, nel confronto europeo*. Banca d'Italia, n. 377.
- Bourdieu, P. (1986). Forms of capital. In J. Richardson (Ed.), *Handbook of theory of research for the sociology of education*. Westport: Greenwood Press.
- Carsrud, A. L., Caglio, C. M., & Olm, K. W. (1986). Entrepreneurs, mentors, networks, and successful new venture development: An exploratory study. In R. Ronstadt, J. A. Hornaday, R. Peterson, & K. H. Vesper (Eds.), *Frontiers of entrepreneurship research*. Wellesley MA: Babson College.
- Coleman, J. (1998). Social capital in the creation of human capital. *American Journal of Sociology*, 94, S95.
- Corsi, K. (2003). *Il controllo organizzativo nella prospettiva transnazionale*. Milano: Giuffrè.
- Das, T. K. (1989). Organizational control: An evolutionary perspective. *Journal of Management Studies*, 26(5).
- Eisenhardt, K., & Schoonhoven, C. (1996). Resource-based view of strategic alliance formation: Strategic and social effects in entrepreneurial firms. *Organization Science*, 7(2), 136–150.
- European Border and Coast Guard Agency—Frontex. (2017). *Frontex risk analysis network quarterly report*.
- Gatti, M. (1999). Fiducia e generazione di conoscenza nelle relazioni tra imprese: il caso ST. *Sinergie*, 50.
- Gillian, C. (1982). *In a different voice*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Glaeser, E. L., Laibson, D., Scheinkman, J. A., & Soutter, C. L. (2000). Measuring trust. *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 115, 811.
- Grandori, A., & Giordani, L. G. (2011). *Organizing entrepreneurship*. London: Routledge.
- Grandori, A., & Soda, G. (1995). Inter-firm networks: Antecedents, mechanisms and forms. *Organization Studies*, 16(2), 183–214.
- Gulati, R. (1995). Does familiarity breed trust? The implication of repeated ties for contractual choice in alliances. *Academy of Management Journal*, 38, 85.
- Gulati, R. (1998). Alliances and networks. *Strategic Management Journal*, 19, 293–317. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3094067>.
- Hoang, H., & Antonic, B. (2003). Network-based research in entrepreneurship: A critical review. *Journal of Business Venturing*, 18, 165–187.
- Larson, J. A., & Starr, A. (1993). Network model of organization formation. *Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice*, 17, 5–16.
- Lerner, M., & Almor, T. (2002). Relationship among strategic capabilities and the performance of women-owned small venture. *Journal of Business Management*, 40, 109–125.
- Lipparini, A., & Lorenzoni, G. (2000). *Imprenditori e imprese. Idee, piani e processi*. Il Mulino: Bologna.
- Mazzarol, T., Volery, T., Doss, N., & Thein, V. (1999). Factor influencing small business start-up. A comparison with previous research. *International Journal of Entrepreneurial Behaviour & Research*, 5, 48–63.
- Nooteboom, A. (2002). *A balanced theory of sourcing, collaboration and networks*. Rotterdam: Mimeo, Erasmus University.
- Ozgen, E., & Baron, R. (2007). Social sources of information in opportunity recognition: Effect of mentor, industry network, and professional forums. *Journal of Business Venturing*, 22, 174–192.
- Paldam, M. (2000). Social capital: One or many? Definition and measurement. *Journal of economic surveys*, 14, 629.

- Paoloni, M., Valeri, M., & Paoloni, P. (2017a). Development perspectives of relational capital in women-led firms. *International Journal of Business and Management*, 12(9), 66–76.
- Paoloni, M., Valeri, M., & Paoloni, P. (2017b). Immigrant women's entrepreneurship: Is there a development model in Italy? *African Journal of Business Management*, 11(15), 357–366.
- Paoloni, P. (2011). *La dimensione relazionale delle imprese femminili*. Milano: Franco Angeli.
- Paoloni, P., & Valeri, M. (2017). An overview on immigrant women's entrepreneurship in the Italian context. In P. Paoloni & R. Lombardi (Eds.), *Gender issues in business and economics*. Berlin: Springer.
- Porter, A. (1998). Social capital, its origins and its applications in modern sociology. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 5.
- Putnam, R. (2000). *Bowling alone*. New York: Simon and Schuster.
- Rodriguez, M. J., & Santos, F. J. (2009). Women nascent entrepreneurs and social capital in the process of firm creation. *International Entrepreneurship and Management Journal*, 5(1), 45.
- Sako, M. (1992). *Prices, quality and trust; Inter-firm relations in Britain and Japan*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Shapiro, A., & Sokol, L. (1982). Social dimensions of entrepreneurship. In D. L. Sexton & H. Vesper (Eds.), *Encyclopedia of entrepreneurship*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Smeltzer, L. R., & Fann, G. L. (1989). Gender differences in external network of small business owner-manager. *Journal of Small Business Management*, 27, 25–32.
- Tarrow, S. (2000). Mad cows and social activists: Contentious politics in the trilateral democracies. In S. Pharr & R. Putman (Eds.), *Disaffected democracies*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Williamson, O. (1993). Calculativeness, trust and economic organisation. *Journal of law and economics*, 36, 453.
- Yin, R. K. (2009). *Case study research: Design and methods* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.