Immigrants' Entrepreneurship in Greece at Times of Crisis: Ambivalent Paths and the Persistence of Institutional Barriers

Panos Hatziprokopiou and Yannis Frangopoulos

1 Introduction

The entrepreneurship of immigrants in Greece is a relatively recent phenomenon, and as such so far has attracted limited academic interest. Arguably, it has expanded quite rapidly over the past two decades, and has been, partly at least, tied to the dynamics of immigrants' settlement and incorporation and the formation of ethnic communities (Labrianidis and Hatziprokopiou 2010). Even more, the phenomenon has been more intense and particularly visible in the Greek capital, where the spread of migrant businesses gradually forms an organic part of the city landscape and the everyday experience of the urban, even in areas not characterized by large concentrations.

The deepening crisis shaking the Greek economy and society since 2009, and the austerity policies applied under the country's joint supervision by the IMF, the European Union (EU) and the European Central Bank (ECB), obviously impact on both the market environment and the institutional framework in ways that affect immigrants and natives alike. The crisis transforms radically the circumstances and the context in which the entrepreneurial activity of migrants took shape during the past two decades, as well as the public debates surrounding it. From earlier press references detecting the emergence of a "Chinatown" in Athens, or celebrating the capital's "new colorful market",[1] relevant news reports now mourn for the outmigration of Chinese entrepreneurs,[2] while the image of closed shops is not uncommon in areas of high immigrant presence. Moreover, the context of the crisis

[1] E.g. *Lifo magazine* of 07-02-2008 (Lifo 2008) and *Kathimerini* newspaper of 05-04-2008 (Onisenko 2008), respectively.

[2] E.g. newspaper *To Vima* of 26-02-2012 (Tratsa 2012).

P. Hatziprokopiou (✉) • Y. Frangopoulos
Department of Spatial Planning and Development, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Thessaloniki, Greece
e-mail: panoshatziprokopiou@hotmail.com; yfrago@plandevel.auth.gr

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has negatively affected the public discourse on "immigration", with xenophobic or overtly racist views dominating the agenda and influencing relevant policies, including biased perceptions linking immigrants' businesses to the underground economy and the "degradation" of specific neighborhoods in central Athens.

It is therefore important, as well as timely, to attempt an assessment of how the phenomenon has evolved in the preceding years and what are the challenges of the present. The experience of post-war immigration countries in northern Europe suggests that self-employment and business-ownership among immigrants grew in the twilight of a different crisis, following the oil-shocks of the 1970s. It is uncertain at the moment whether this development will find a historical parallel in the contemporary Greek case. This chapter draws from ongoing fieldwork research in Athens in order to analyse the performance, problems and prospects of small businesses run by immigrants in Athens, at the time of the crisis.

The chapter is structured in three main sections. In the first section, we give a short introduction of key issues in the literature on ethnic/migrant entrepreneurship, and an overview of the phenomenon in Greece over the past decade, situated within the specificities of the Greek economy and of immigrants' labour market integration. The second section discusses the context and methodology of our study, which focuses specifically on central Athens and is based on a comparative account of small businesses run by both immigrants and native Greeks, the profile of whom is briefly outlined. The third section underlines the persisting institutional barriers and shortfalls of Greek migratory policy, which put an additional burden on immigrant businesses at a time of severe market difficulties and liquidity problems, hampering not only immigrants' entrepreneurship but their social incorporation at large. The chapter closes with a conclusion summarising key arguments and drawing some policy implications.

2 Theoretical Framework and the Case of Greece

2.1 The Literature on Ethnic Entrepreneurship

In reviewing the literature on ethnic/migrant entrepreneurship about a decade ago, Kloosterman and Rath (2003) counted more than 1,700 publications. The various approaches found in this vast and mostly empirical knowledge-base may be classified into two main "families". One focuses on the characteristics of migrants or ethnic groups and the resources they have, i.e. what, broadly speaking, could from an economic standpoint be described as the supply side. The other takes into account the wider socio-economic environment and the opportunities and constraints it may entail, covering the side of demand.

In the first strand of approaches, one encounters perspectives accounting for the ethno-cultural characteristics of immigrant communities (e.g., Barrett et al. 1996; Basu and Altinay 2002). Echoing Max Weber's work on the importance of protestant ethics in capitalist development (Weber 1989), the contribution of E. Bonacich

(1973) on "middleman minorities" has been pioneering in the study of historical diaspora entrepreneurial communities (Jews, Chinese, Greeks, Armenians), which thrived on the basis of hard work and ethno-cultural ties. More recent contributions, however, moved away from such emphasis on "culture", which came often to be reduced to a rather essentialist category supposing some kind of business predisposition of specific ethnic groups, and focused instead on the collective resources of immigrant communities, especially social networks and the ability to use them as social capital (e.g. Portes 1995). In this light, family and ethnicity become competitive advantages for immigrant entrepreneurs, providing market information and startup capital, as well as a pool of labor, etc. (Ram and Jones 1998; Smallbone et al. 2005). Finally, perspectives inspired by neoclassical economics stress on individual resources, primarily human capital (education and skills, as well as past experience, etc.) of immigrants involved in business activity (e.g. Bates and Dunham 1993).

The second group of approaches, on the other hand, includes perspectives that consider the factors leading (some) immigrants towards entrepreneurial activity (Kloosterman and Rath 2001). Part of these focuses on the "opportunity structures" that shape demand for products and services targeting either specific ethnic communities or a wider clientele, as well as on the socio-economic and institutional framework that determines immigrants' access to business activity (Aldrich and Waldinger 1990; Ram 1997). In respect to this later, emphasis is also given to the negative factors driving migrants to a disadvantaged position in the labor market (informal work, unemployment or underemployment, poor pay and harsh working conditions, racism and discrimination, etc.). Under this view, entrepreneurship emerges as an option out of necessity and for a good part constitutes no more than a survival strategy (Phizacklea and Ram 1995; Ward and Jenkins 1984; Bommes and Kolb 2004). Nevertheless, even if responding to social disadvantage, immigrants' steps towards entrepreneurship may also be seen as a proactive strategy that values autonomy, economic independence and control over their lives (Valenzuela 2001).

Since the early 1990s, there have been efforts towards integrated analytical frameworks that account for both "supply" and "demand". One such contribution proposed an "interactive model" looking at both the characteristics and resources of migrant groups and at "opportunities structures" (Aldrich and Waldinger 1990; Waldinger et al. 1990). Another, building on the "middleman minorities" approach, proposed the "ethnic economy" as a field of analysis, that is the entire economic activity developed among a specific ethnic group, including entrepreneurs, self-employed and paid employees in coethnic' enterprises (Light et al. 1994; Light and Gold 2000). Research on "ethnic enclaves" takes a similar view on the entire economic activity within a specific ethnic group, but grounds this on specific urban locales also characterised by a concentration of immigrant residences; ethnic enclaves may also be a hub of community life and often serve as corridors of social mobility (Wilson and Portes 1980; Zhou 1992, 2004). Lastly, the so-called "mixed embeddedness" model, suggests that immigrants are embedded in both social (ethnic and family) networks, and wider socio-economic structures and

political-institutional environments, whether at local, regional, national or transnational level (Rath 2000; Kloosterman and Rath 2001, 2003).

Conventional wisdom may assume that the undertaking of entrepreneurial activity by migrants does not strictly fit mainstream definitions of entrepreneurship, which entail the dimensions of innovation and risk. Yet, a review of the literature uncovers elements of both, albeit in peculiar ways (Aldrich and Waldinger 1990). The dimension of innovation, for instance, may be evident in the ability of immigrant entrepreneurs to effectively mobilize individual resources (e.g. human capital) and especially collective ones on the basis of ethnic and family ties (Smallbone et al. 2005), and to size opportunities provided within or outside their own ethnic communities (Kloosterman and Rath 2003). The dimension of risk is obvious, e.g. in respect to entrepreneurship as a proactive strategy of immigrants in response to their difficult circumstances in an otherwise exclusionary labour market and/or an unfamiliar and sometimes hostile environment (Valenzuela 2001), but also in the likelihood to engage in informal activities, i.e. basically legal activities which however bypass regulatory frameworks in order to survive on modest financial resources and in often saturated markets (Kloosterman et al. 1999; Ram et al. 2003). In that sense, immigrants' entrepreneurship may be seen not simply as a positive step aiming at improving their own and their families' position, but even as an active strategy towards economic integration which may impact on their ethnic communities in various ways.

Before closing this section, it is important to highlight the significance of history and context.[3] For the most part, the literature on ethnic/migrant entrepreneurship derives from the historical experience of North America; it is in the American context where the prevailing approaches have been originally developed (e.g. Volery 2007). Especially in the US context, generally conducive to entrepreneurship, immigrants' involvement in self-employment and business activity could be seen as steps of successive generations towards upward social mobility, assimilation and some degree of fulfillment of the American dream. European research has developed since the 1980s, following a substantial growth of independent economic activity among immigrants. This certainly came as migratory processes in the "traditional" host countries matured, with settlement, family unification and the establishment of migrant communities. But it was not unrelated to the aftermath of the 1970s oil shocks, when, with deindustrialization and economic restructuring, industrial jobs previously performed *en-mass* by migrant labor in post-war decades disappeared leaving many unemployed (Waldinger et al. 1990), while a new entrepreneurial climate gradually came to favour the expansion of micro-entreprises. Our study on immigrants' entrepreneurship in Greece at times of crisis

[3] Inevitably incomplete, this brief literature review has not touched upon critical perspectives in the literature on ethnic/migrant entrepreneurship and has left a number of issues outside the scope of this chapter, such as the question of class (and class resources), the spatial dimension (and how immigrant businesses are shaped by urban contexts or in turn decisively transform them), aspects such as business finance and strategies of breaking out, the diversity and diversification of activities.

is therefore inevitably inspired by the European experience of crisis in the 1970s, which decisively determined the history of immigrants' move to self-employment. Is such a shift possible in the contemporary Greek context? In order to respond to this question, our research posed a more tangible one: how is the current economic downturn actually affecting existing immigrants' businesses in the country? Before however discussing some of our findings in that respect, it is first necessary to give a brief overview of the peculiarities of the Greek economy and labour market, and the respective place of immigrant labor and entrepreneurial activity in the years before the crisis: this is the topic of the next section.

2.2 Immigrant's Entrepreneurship and the Labour Market in Greece

Greece may be part of the "developed world" in terms of GDP per capita, but its economy is characterised by considerable structural problems, which have been at the heart of domestic factors that made the country vulnerable to the crisis. Among these, a rather oversized agriculture (Damianos et al. 1998), and a limited (and shrinking) manufacturing sector, with mostly "traditional" industries marked by low "structural competitiveness" (Ioakimoglou and Efstathopoulos 2001). In addition, the Greek productive structure has long been based on a plethora of small and medium-scale entreprises (SMEs), often family owned and family run, and on high rates of self-employment. While, especially since the 1980s, part of the private sector, including both SMEs and larger firms, based their activities on the availability of state and EU funds, they did not, in their majority, invest in innovation and technology, but rather chose to compete by squizzing labor costs, generating an increased demand for cheap and flexible work. Moreover, pervasive clientelism has often resulted in privileged state-economy relations (Lyberaki 2000), while a large underground economy, estimated at between 30 % and 45 % of the GDP (Fakiolas 1999: ft. 4), reduces significantly the state budget. At the same time, administrative bureaucracy and disorganisation has resulted in particularly thin supporting institutional structures and services, with a serious welfare deficit partly counterbalanced by vertical and family bonds (Lyberaki 2000). Such conditions seriously affect the framework for entrepreneurial activity, dominated by rigid, time-consuming and costly procedures that were recently addressed with a 2010 Law, with nevertheless limited impact to date (Arapis 2011).

Table 1, based on Labour Force Survey statistics, clearly shows limited shares of self-employment and business-ownership among foreign nationals residing in Greece. The relatively limited involvement of immigrants in independent economic activity should be understood in the context briefed above, particularly in respect to the structural factors that shaped the demand for migrant labor in the Greek economy in recent decades, and determined immigrants' labor market integration. Indeed, immigrants' employment in the past two decades responded largely to the needs

Table 1 Employed labour force, by position in employment, 2011

Country of nationality	Greece	'Developed world'[a]	Albania	Other
Persons in employment	3,815,740	16,688	189,618	172,384
Employers	8.6	7.7	2.5	1.1
Self-employed	24.6	15.5	6.4	8.4
Assistants in family businesses	5.9	8.6	1.2	1.9
Employees	60.9	68.1	90.0	88.6

Source: Greek Statistical Authority (EL.STAT.), Labour Force Survey, 2011, 1st trimester, supplied to the authors upon request, authors' elaboration
[a]EU-15, EEA, Cyprus & Malta, North America, Oceania & Japan

of SMEs, self-employed individuals and private households, mostly in manual and low-skilled positions unattractive to the indigenous labor force due to high qualifications and rising labour market aspirations, at a time – back in the 1990s - of increased living standards and prospects (e.g. Hatziprokopiou 2006). The high seasonality of some of these activities (such as agriculture, tourism, and construction) and the difficulties to regulate others (e.g. domestic service, cleaning and care), combined with a "tradition" in informal arrangements (Vaiou and Hadjimichalis 1997) and considerably late and inadequate state interventions to regularise immigrants' residence and work, have resulted in high rates of informal employment among immigrants and exploitation in the labour market (Hatziprokopiou 2006). In this context, the data outlined in Table 1 confirm the persisting disproportionately high shares of immigrants in paid employment, alongside disproportionately high rates of indigenous Greek who are employers and self-employed, reversing thus the typical pattern observed in north European countries, where entrepreneurship among migrants is widespread (Cavounidis 2006). The Table 1 is also telling in that a small section of the foreign labour force, i.e. those originating from advanced capitalist countries, are far more involved in entrepreneurship as compared to "immigrants". What could not be shown, considering the methodological deficiencies of Labour Force Surveys and the limitations of nationality-based statistics, is that numerically small immigrant groups such as the Chinese, Nigerians, or Bangladeshis have high rates of self-employment and business-ownership, and that it is impossible to account for those immigrants who have acquired Greek citizenship – even if citizenship acquisition has been limited for third country nationals apart from those proving Greek origins.

Nevertheless, considering the history of immigration to Greece, which as a massive phenomenon dates back to the early 1990s, and the highly restrictive policies which left the vast majority of immigrants without any opportunity to regularise their status until 1998, it could be argued that the development of immigrant entrepreneurship has been rather rapid. It is therefore more appropriate to trace immigrant entrepreneurship beyond official data, in the limited studies available to date. Research on immigrants' economic integration in the first half of the 2000s has identified early movements into self-employment and entrepreneurial activity (Labrianidis and Lyberaki 2005; Lyberaki and Maroukis 2005; Hatziprokopiou 2006). A first generation of qualitative studies had then seen entrepreneurship mostly as survival strategy, because of immigrants' unfavorable position in the labor market

(Lazaridis and Koumandraki 2003), but stressing also the importance of autonomy in the context of family strategies to make a living and improve conditions for the second generation (Serderakis et al. 2003; Liapi 2006), or self realisation and fullfillment by actively sizing opportunities related to cultural consumption (Petronoti 2008). A second generation of studies, based on larger research samples, gave more detailed accounts focusing on the goals and motivations of migrants, the role of social networks, business strategies and activities (Halkias et al. 2007; Piperopoulos and Ikonomou 2007; Labrianidis and Hatziprokopiou 2008, 2010; Piperopoulos 2010; van Helsuum 2010; Polyzou 2011; Liargovas and Skandalis 2012), as well as on the individual profile of immigrant entrepreneurs and the resources available in terms of human or financial capital (Lianos and Psiridou 2006; Piperopoulos and Ikonomou 2007; Labrianidis and Hatziprokopiou 2008). Alongside these, there has been some special interest in the institutional framework, including e.g. measures to promote entrepreneurship and specific programs to support entrepreneurship among refugees (Mestheneos 2000; Hatziprokopiou 2008; van Heelsum 2010).

The emerging diversity of immigrants' independent economic activities led towards attempts to theorise and provide typologies of migrant entrepreneurship, by relating empirical evidence to relevant debates in the literature (Mavromatis 2006; Labrianidis and Hatziprokopiou 2008, 2010; Piperopoulos 2010). Moreover, a number of studies have thus taken a spatial perspective, looking at the interplay between immigrants immigrants' entrepreneurial activity, residential geographies and/or everyday life in specific urban locales (Mavromatis 2006; Labrianidis and Hatziprokopiou 2008, 2010; van Helsuum 2010; Polyzou 2011; Balampanidis and Polyzou 2012). At the same time, actual developments on the ground call for a consideration of the links between entrepreneurship and immigrants' economic incorporation, as well as to broader processes of social change in Greece. Following Labrianidis and Hatziprokopiou (2010, pp. 211–212), for instance, (some) immigrants involved in entrepreneurial activity appear to act "as mainstream entrepreneurs" by reproducing economic practices that "remain widespread among Greeks". Moreover, settlement and incorporation suggest the formation of immigrant ethnic communities, generating a demand for special products or services, and thus both a social *milieu* and market niche for the emergence of ethnic economies (Mavromatis 2006). Of course, not every type of activity or entrepreneurial migrant community would fit strictly either of the above explanations. A major exception concerns Chinese migrant entrepreneurs, mostly involved in the clothing trade, who seem to move along China's globalizing economy Labrianidis and Hatziprokopiou (2010, p. 213) and act as "middleman minorities" (Mavromatis 2006) for Chinese export industries targeting the general clientele (Polyzou 2011).

Obviously, the conjuncture of the crisis and austerity in the country alters radically the context in which the phenomenon takes shape and unfolds. Even if it may have been a survival option for many, the spread of entrepreneurship among migrants has been indeed related to a gradual improvement of their socio-economic status– either as self-employed converging with dominant employment patterns, or as consumers of ethnic products or services (Labrianidis and Hatziprokopiou 2010).

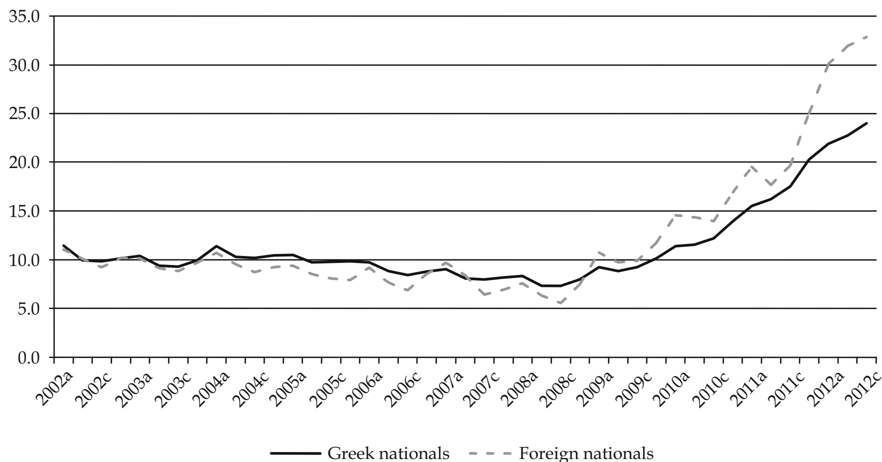

Fig. 1 Unemployment rates in Greece, 2002–2012 (Source: Greek Statistical Authority (EL.STAT.), Labour Force Surveys, 2002–2012, by trimester, supplied to the authors upon request, own elaboration)

This picture may now be well reversed. Indicative of the increasing hardship in recent years is that, for the first time since 2009, the unemployment of immigrants exceeds the rising rates among natives, as illustrated in Fig. 1. Even more, the structural qualities of unemployment have shifted: while in the past two decades unemployment concerned largely young educated people, it now affects increasingly those in low-skilled and manual positions, and industries such as construction where migrant labour has been overrepresented.

Nevertheless, a look into statistics indicative of self-employment and business ownership does not seem to confirm already a retreat of immigrants from independent economic activity. On the contrary, as illustrated on Table 2, showing data on foreign nationals insured with OAEE (the country's social security fund for freelancers), between 2010 and 2011 there has been both numerical and proportional growth of immigrants registered with the fund, while the number of Greeks has been reduced. Looking at the annual growth rates of specific groups one may observe that, at a time of massive business shut-downs, immigrants from countries such as Bangladesh, Pakistan, Egypt, or the new EU member-states (especially Romania and Bulgaria) are moving towards self-employment and business set-ups. Could this indicate a response to the increasingly harshening conditions in the labour market, i.e. immigrants moving to independent economic activity as paid employment becomes scarcer? Or could this suggest a continuation of trends that have been in place before the crisis and relate to the dynamics of immigrants' incorporation and settlement at large? This remains unclear at the moment, and so are the chances of this trend to be sustained in the near future, considering the worsening market conditions and the austerity policies in place, both of which seriously make it difficult specifically for small businesses, as the majority of immigrant enterprises are. Although it is rather early to make any judgement in

Table 2 Foreign nationals insured with OAEE, selected nationalities, 2010–2011

	2010		2011		2010–2011
	N	%	N	%	% change
Total	831,238	100.0	811,714	100.0	–2.3
Foreign nationals	24,598	3.0	25,759	3.2	4.7
'Developed World'[a]	7,377	30.0	7,652	29.7	3.7
EU enlargement 2004/2007[b]	3,627	14.7	3,845	14.9	6.0
Other foreign nationals	13,594	55.3	14,262	55.4	4.9
Albania	*7,132*	*29.0*	*7,304*	*28.4*	*2.4*
China	*670*	*2.7*	*674*	*2.6*	*0.6*
Pakistan	*537*	*2.2*	*607*	*2.4*	*13.0*
Syria	*534*	*2.2*	*560*	*2.2*	*4.9*
Ukraine	*507*	*2.1*	*503*	*2.0*	*–0.8*
Russia	*468*	*1.9*	*495*	*1.9*	*5.8*
Turkey	*462*	*1.9*	*464*	*1.8*	*0.4*
Egypt	*409*	*1.7*	*449*	*1.7*	*9.8*
Bangladesh	*321*	*1.3*	*372*	*1.4*	*15.9*
Other	2,554	*10.4*	2,834	*11.0*	*11.0*

Source: OAEE statistics, supplied to the authors upon request, own elaboration
[a]EU-15, EEA, Cyprus & Malta, North America, Oceania & Japan
[b]Excluding Cyprus & Malta

that respect, our research attempts to shed light to some of the major difficulties faced by immigrant entrepreneurs at present.

3 The Study: Immigrant Entrepreneurs in Central Athens

3.1 The Research Context: Athens' Multiple Crisis, Small Businesses and Migrants

Even more pronounced is the entrepreneurial activity of immigrants in Athens, and this may have two sides of interpretation. On the one hand, Greater Athens concentrates the majority of Greece's immigrants: nearly half of the migrant population lived in Attica at the time of the 2001 Census (the latest available detailed datasource on immigrants' geographical distribution), more than one third in Athens Municipality alone (e.g. Labrianidis and Hatziprokopiou 2008: Table 1). On the other hand, the Athenian productive base and labour market remain the most dynamic in the country, even amidst the years of the crisis. This latter is illustrated on Table 3, presenting data of business-owners and co-owners registered with the Athens Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the largest Chamber in Greece, for the last 5 years. One may clearly observe that the number of individual members has been growing, even if the annual growth rate has lately dropped. It is worth mentioning that the number of non-Greeks rose from 4,073 in

Table 3 Foreign nationals at the Athens Chamber of Commerce & Industry, selected nationalities, 2008–2012

	Annual growth rates				2012	
	2008–2009	2009–2010	2010–2011	2011–2012	N	%
Total	4.6	4.6	4.2	2.5	171.203	100.0
Foreign nationals	5.6	5.1	3.9	2.3	13,246	7.7
North America, Oceania & Japan	3.4	1.8	0.8	1.0	884	6.7
EU-15 & EEA	5.8	3.1	4.9	1.3	5,333	40.3
Cyprus	4.2	3.4	2.3	1.8	1,968	14.9
EU enlargement 2004/2007	11.1	11.3	15.8	5.2	586	4.4
Other foreign nationals	5.9	8.6	2.7	3.8	4,475	33.8
Albania	7.7	10.1	8.2	3.9	*948*	*7.2*
Turkey	4.8	3.2	4.4	3.3	*413*	*3.1*
China	5.1	1.9	3.0	2.5	*286*	*2.2*
Syria	13.0	−9.9	2.3	1.7	*179*	*1.4*
Egypt	3.7	2.8	3.4	2.0	*153*	*1.2*
Russia	9.8	10.9	13.4	4.7	*133*	*1.0*
Pakistan	8.6	10.9	10.7	4.8	*130*	1.0
Other	7.1	5.2	6.4	3.4	4,030	*16.9*

Source: ACCI statistics, supplied to the authors upon request, own elaboration

2006 (van Heelsum 2010: Table 18) to 13,246 by the summer of 2012. Moreover, the growth rates in the last 5 years have been exceptionally high for specific groups, especially nationals of new EU member states, primarily Bulgaria, Romania and Poland, as well as Albanians and Pakistanis.

The former dimension requires some further attention to the dynamics of immigrants' settlement. The suburbanisation of the capital's population over the past three decades or so, especially of middle and upper-middle strata, has resulted in declining rents and in a housing gap that was subsequently filled by immigrants and their families, as suggested by a number of urban researchers studying Athens in recent years (Maloutas 2004; Kandylis and Kavoulakos 2008; Arapoglou et al. 2009). According to the same researchers, the "traditional" social mix of Athens' residential space in post-war times, characterised by low levels of residential segregation and high rates of home-ownership, has been replaced by a socio-ethnic mix marked by severe inequalities. Far from emerging "ghettos", however, and despite relative concentrations of specific groups in specific districts, the areas most affected by such population shifts are neither dominated by any single immigrant group, nor migrant presence overall constitutes a residential majority. Still, Athens' new residential socio-economic structures and inequality patterns seem to feed conflict and competition over the space of the city, which in the last few years involves open racist mobilisation against immigrants (Arapoglou et al. 2009; Kandylis and Kavoulakos 2011).

On the other hand, the aforementioned "dynamism" of Athens is bound to the overall centralised structure of the Greek economy, and is extremely fragile at the time of the crisis particularly regarding SMEs. In fact, the typical Greek family

SME at the historic centre of Athens is under multiple pressures related to a range of economic, social and ethno-cultural changes, which preceded the global financial crisis of 2008, while it has lost its earlier position as a privileged interlocutor vis-à-vis the State (Tsigganou 2009). In respect to the latter, a study by Tsigganou (2009) recorded the "complaints" of central Athens SMEs against the state not simply in terms of its inadequacy in providing motives and support, but also about its role in hampering entrepreneurialism through bureaucracy, high taxation and high social security contributions. In respect to the former, part of the pressures on SMEs in Athens relate to a reconfiguration of the relationship between the local and the supra-local in respect to competition and commercial activity in the Athenian space, particularly regarding the move of a freat deal of commercial activity from the city-centre to the periphery and from small scale activities to large chains, superstores and malls (Tsigganou 2009; Roinioti 2009; Hadjimichalis 2011). This has not been irrelevant to the exodus of residents from central Athens (Maloutas 2004; Arapoglou et al. 2009), but is also related to the planning deficit in respect to public interest and a shift of state intervention towards supporting the strategies of large private capital, reflecting global trends of urban economic development (Hadjimichalis 2011). Even at the eve of the crisis, Greek SMEs in central Athens appeared to one-sidedly perceive the alleged inaction of the state as deliberately facilitating an organised plan of downgrading the city-centre, one that includes the concentration of immigrants and their economic activities, who are seen both as competitors and as a threat related to a rise in criminality and insecurity in the area (Tsigganou 2009; Roinioti 2009; Hainas 2009; Lambraki 2009).

To some extent, following more or less the shifting residential patterns of the population, the entrepreneurial space occupied by immigrants in central Athens was previously devalorised and left vacant of former uses, as their Greek owners shut down, retired or moved out. Obviously, this is not an analogy applying in similar ways to every type of activity, group or area. So, for instance, entrepreneurship and self-employment among Albanian immigrants often do not display any "ethnic" characteristics and tend to assimilate both spatially and entrepreneurially in the urban economy following the wider residential dispersal and assimilation of the Albanian migrant population across the city (Mavromatis 2006). On the other hand, part of downtown Athens (around Omonoia square) forms an extremely diverse multiethnic commercial space, where a wide range of ethnic ventures owned by, and serving, immigrants from various origins coexist next to long-established Greek-owned stores, and many have a similarly supra-local character attracting customers from across the city (Mavromatis 2006; van Heelsum 2010). At the same time, the concentration of Chinese-owned businesses in the district of Metaxourgeio induces multiple dynamics at the local level that give way to the formation of a peculiar ethnic enclave, which may be centred on Chinese commercial activities in clothing wholesale and retail targeting the broader clientele, but involves a lively local ethnic Chinese community and various stores covering its specialized demand (Polyzou 2011). Lastly, in neighbourhood of Kypseli, greatly affected by depopulation and immigrant settlement and characterized by social and ethnic mix as well as by a mix of spatial uses, one may encounter a multiplicity of

small shops and business serving primarily the everyday needs of local residents, whether natives or of immigrant origin (Balabanidis and Polyzou 2012).

The above only sketch a summary of major trends in order to describe the context of our study in both space and time. Our research is inevitably situated within a double set of dynamics. On the one hand, the multiple and complex processes of migration and immigrants' settlement in Greece and especially Athens over the past two decades. On the other, the wider trends of economic, social and spatial change in Athens, which take an extremely problematic turn in the conjuncture of the crisis, which goes beyond market conditions as such. We next provide an overview of our project and methodology, and outline some key results by comparing the characteristics of immigrant entrepreneurs and their businesses to those of their Greek counterparts.

3.2 Research Methodology, Profile and Main Features of Migrant Enterprises

The empirical results hereby discussed derive from a wider study entitled "*Emerging ethnic economies at times of crisis: socio-economic and spatial dimensions of immigrant entrepreneurship in Athens*", funded by the Hellenic Observatory at the London School of Economics and Political Science (UK). The project, which is ongoing, aims at capturing the trends, patterns and dimensions of immigrants' involvement in entrepreneurship at a time of economic crisis in Greece, and at exploring the emergence of ethnic economies in Athens and the ways these are becoming grounded in the everyday local experiences of three central Athenian neighbourhoods, namely Kypseli, Ambelokipoi and Metaxourgeio. It is based on both desktop and fieldwork research and combines quantitative and qualitative methods. Desktop research entailed a review of the literature as well as background empirical material and official statistics from various sources. Fieldwork research involves two stages. The first phase took place in June 2012 and was exploratory, based on ethnographic mapping of ethnic businesses at the three neighbourhoods under investigation. During the second, extensive phase, which started in September 2012, we have been conducting an exhaustive survey of street-level shops and business in selected streets of each neighbourhood, aiming at collecting basic quantifiable data but also including open questions providing qualitative information. Out target is a sample of at least 120 questionnaires, 60 with immigrant entrepreneurs and 60 with neighboring native Greek businesses, spread equally across the three neighbourhoods. These are to be supplemented with 15 in-depth interviews with migrant entrepreneurs, five in each neighbourhood.

In this chapter, we present results from a preliminary sample of 100 street-level businesses, 50 run by immigrants and 50 by native Greeks. This sample was purpose-built, in the sense that we have conducted the survey in specific streets of

the three neighborhoods, selected on the basis of some visible concentration of immigrant shops and businesses. But, at the same time, it has been random as far as the selected streets are concerned, since we distributed our questionnaire door-to-door to *all* shops and businesses locally, achieving an average response rate between 60 % and 70 % among open and operating ventures. The rationale of our comparative framework is to explore commonalities and differences between immigrant and Greek small businesses at the local level, in terms of business history, activities, clientele, strategies, problems and prospects at the time of the crisis. For the purposes of this chapter, we have left out of our analysis the socio-spatial dimension of our study. Instead, we chose to focus on the responses related to the impact of the crisis and on the major problems affecting the performance of the businesses. Among these, we specifically analyse institutional barriers, because – together with market conditions - these appear to affect both natives and immigrants. The latter are expectedly much more vulnerable to state bureaucracy and the deficiencies of administration, and face specific issues related to their migratory status which not only affect them at a personal level, but also seriously hamper their business' performance. Before moving on to this, however, it is first necessary to offer a descriptive account of the businesses and their owners.

Table 4 summarises the demographic profile of entrepreneurs. Both sections of the sample include an equal number of male and female entrepreneurs, with the number of men doubling that of women. Immigrant owners are on average younger than their Greek counterparts: four out of five are between 31 and 60 years old, while nearly two out of five Greeks are over 50. This obviously reflects both the age structures of immigrants and natives in general, but also the more established patterns of Greek business-owners, who have either been born in Athens (54 %) or have moved there decades ago (46 %, nearly two thirds of them before 1980). By contrast, more than half of migrant entrepreneurs had arrived in Greece during the 1990s, while another 20 % in the 2000s, while the average period of living in Greece is about 14 years. The vast majority (70 % or more) are family people with children, which is not unrelated to the family-character of the businesses, both as means to generate an income for the entire family, and as collective ventures involving the work of family members. Eight immigrant entrepreneurs are or were married to a Greek, which as we will see later on facilitates access to a special migratory status that allows the overcoming of institutional limitations. In terms of their origins, most immigrant entrepreneurs come from five main countries - Egypt (9), Albania (7), Pakistan (7), Iraq (6) and China (5) – while the rest originate from a variety of other east European, African and Asian countries.

Table 5 outlines the educational profile and employment background of respondents. Clearly immigrant entrepreneurs tend to be better educated than their neighboring Greek business-owners. This may suggest that educated immigrants are more likely to be involved in independent economic activity, underlining the importance of human capital. However, of those who declared the specialism of their qualifications (18 in each group) it appears that native Greeks tend to be involved in business activities related to their education (12 out of 18), which is the case for only two of the migrants, suggesting that the deskilling

Table 4 Demographic profile of the sample (N)

		Migrant		Native	
	Age and family status	Male	Female	Male	Female
Age	21–30	3	2	2	0
	31–40	12	5	11	1
	41–50	14	4	13	2
	51–60	6	1	3	6
	>60	0	0	6	3
	Missing data	2	1	2	1
Family status	Single	5	1	9	1
	Married to a Greek	2	2	25	10
	Married to a coethnic	25	4	0	0
	Married to someone of a different nationality	3	0	0	2
	Divorced/widowed (former spouse Greek)	1	1	3	0
	Divorced/widowed (former spouse coethnic)	1	5	0	0
	Have children	28	10	25	10
	Subtotal	37	13	37	13
	Total	50		50	

Source: Fieldwork research

Table 5 Educational qualifications and professional background (N)

		Migrant	Native
Education	Primary	3	6
	3-years secondary	5	6
	6-years secondary	17	16
	Technical/professional secondary	3	5
	Technical/professional post-secondary	5	6
	University/polytechnic	14	9
	Missing data	3	2
Past employment	Paid employee, same or similar activity	11	8
	Paid employee, different activity	18	11
	Own business, same or similar activity	9	14
	Own business, different activity	6	5
	Pupil or student	3	6
	Unemployed	1	3
	Missing data	2	3

Source: Fieldwork research

observed in the jobs migrants usually perform in paid employment applies also to their entrepreneurial ventures. Nevertheless, two out of five seem to built on the experience acquired either (mostly) by having worked in a similar job as paid employees, or by running a similar enterprise in the past – while another six build on their entrepreneurial experience even if in some different activity. The majority though (36 %) used to perform paid work to their current business.

Moving now to the ventures themselves, these are almost exclusively registered as single-owner enterprises (for 92 % of the migrants and 90 % of natives). Among

these however, six immigrants had a partner informally: the pattern encountered is that the business is managed by a respondent, but registered in the name of a family member with a more stable legal status, usually the spouse. We also came across two cases of businesses registered in the name of a native Greek although actually run by our migrant respondents. Both of these examples, albeit exceptional cases, are definitely indicative of the ways through which immigrant entrepreneurs practically cope with the institutional obstacles they are faced with. On the other hand, the majority of the businesses in the survey do not formally employ personell: this was the case for 21 immigrants' businesses but only 13 of the Greek-owned ones, and in most cases concerned just one registered employee. Half of the employees working for Greeks and six of those working for immigrants are members of the owners' immediate family, while immigrant entrepreneurs are more likely to employ other migrants, usually coethnics. About half of both groups of entrepreneurs are in practice assisted by the informal work provided by unregistered employees, who are in their majority also family members. Clearly, both native and migrant small business-owners rely heavily on family-based social networks, which include informal work, but this is more pronounced in the case of natives while immigrants are also based on the labour of coethnics.

The average number of years in business for immigrant entrepreneurs is 5.9 years, substantially lower than the life of Greek-owned businesses, which were on average active for 15.8 years. In fact, the vast majority of immigrant businesses were set from 2000 onwards, 18 of them since 2009 and only two before the year 2000, while 30 % of the Greek businesses started in the 1970s and 1980s, another 22 % in the 1990s, and just one out of five was set up since 2009. This clearly reflects both the more established character of Greek SMEs in central Athens, and the recent move of immigrants towards entrepreneurial activity. Correlating the life-span of business life and the age of the owners, we could suggest that a good share of Greek-owned businesses are ageing alongside their ageing owners, while immigrant entrepreneurs are relatively younger with few years in business.

In terms of their activities, more than half of the businesses owned by immigrant and over two thirds of Greek-owned ones are involved in commerce. Figure 2 displays the main business activities for the two groups. Clearly a more or less equal spread of both Greek and immigrant entrepreneurs are involved in small-scale local retail, including convenience stores and kiosks, foodstores and groceries, hairdressers and beauty services, etc. In the case of immigrants, the local character of their activities is often accompanied by an ethnic one, since they target the migrant clientele of the area in which they operate: this may vary from e.g. foodstores selling products from the countries of origin, as well as specialised services such as internet and call centres – an activity exclusively encountered among immigrant entrepreneurs only. Immigrants appear also to be more involved in coffee-shops and restaurants, which are also local in character and often function as local community husband meeting places for people from the same group. On the other hand, typical local stores offering furniture and home equipment, or home-maintenance material and related services (electrics, plumping, colours, etc.), though not absent among immigrants, are far more common among Greeks.

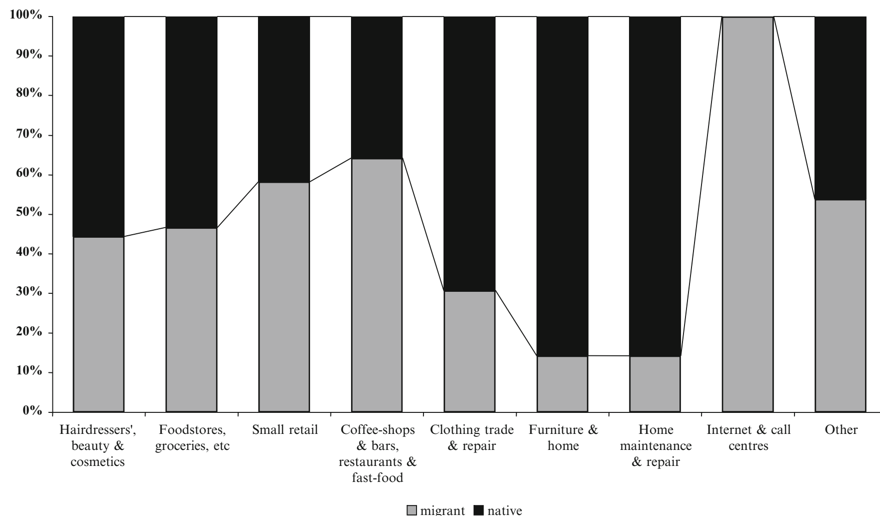

Fig. 2 Types of business activities (Source: Fieldwork research)

Clothing stores were also more common among Greeks, though specifically in the area of Metaxourgeio we should acknowledge significant language barriers that has not allowed us interviewing Chinese wholesale traders. Lastly, we should underline that some 13 immigrant-owned business perform multiple activities accompanying their main one, which is the case for only two among the native-owned businesses: for example, offering money transfer services or internet facilities, alongside their mainly retail activity.

In sum, more than half (27) of immigrant businesses offer either "ethnic products", in some cases alongside products targeting the wider clientele, or services addressed to an "ethnic clientele". In both cases, the customer base is primarily local, and this applies to for the Greek-owned businesses. The majority of both (about 80 %), however, operated in rather saturated local markets in which they have to compete wirh local stores and businesses offering similar products or services. When asked to provide more details of how owners perceive their customers' preference, they came up with a series of responses which are summarised on Table 6 (note that the question allowed for multiple responses). The local base of their clientele is clear for both groups, as is the specialty of their products: in the latter case, migrants referred mostly to their "ethnic" products, while Greeks emphasised the quality of their stock. Although important for both groups, immigrant stressed their cheap prices as a key reason attracting both their immigrant and native Greek customers. On the other hand, Greek businesses are more established, as we have seen, and thus the owners have "loyal" customers, with whom they maintain personal relationships over the years, including past local residents who have moved out to the suburbs. The most significant differentiation perhaps is the flexible working hours on which immigrant businesses commonly operate, often involving not just long working days but also opening at weekends,

Table 6 Reasons for customers preference (%, multiple responses)

Multiple responses	Migrants (%)	Natives (%)
Cheaper products/services	44.0	38.8
Rare or quality products/services	38.0	42.9
Customers are friends/acquaintances or they drop in to socialise	28.0	36.7
Customers are local residents	40.0	42.9
Flexible working hours	44.0	12.2
Something else	14.0	34.7

Source: Fieldwork research

something which some Greek neighbouring businesses complaint about, in terms of unfair competition and limited administrative controls. This once again brings institutional and regulatory aspects to the fore, which we analyse in the next section.

4 The Crisis and the Persistence of Institutional Barriers

In response to our question on the business performance over the last year or so, the vast majority (88 %) of all entrepreneurs talked about an increasingly difficult situation. Notably, however, more than half (58 %) of native Greeks described the situation as extremely difficult, involving considerable drops in their income, which was the case for 38 % of immigrants. As our qualitative material also reveals, this may not suggest that Greek-owned SMEs actually suffer more from the crisis, but rather that they have lost a far wider share of their past profitability, while immigrant businesses were often marginally surviving. The difficulties are so severe for some of our respondents, that some 12.8 % of the migrants and 10.4 % of Greeks seriously considered to shut their business down, another 6 % and 10 % respectively had fired formally-working employees, while some 8.5 % and 6.3 % respectively were not able to pay for their basic social security contributions to OAEE for a period of more than 2 months.

When asked specifically about the problems and difficulties encountered at present, some 74 % of the migrants and 66 % of native entrepreneurs referred to overall drops in consumption, either because their customer base has been reduced or because they simply spend less. For migrants in particular, their "ethnic"clientele is not just impoverished, due to unemployment or income reduction, but also – obviously as a side effect of these – because they migrate either back to countries of origin, or even elsewhere in Europe: this we have been told by entrepreneurs originating from a variety of countries, in some cases triggered mostly by pull factors for return (e.g. Egyptians, or Iraqui Kurds), in others chiefly by push factors from Greece (e.g. Albanians, or Chinese). Another 34 % and 64 % respectively of migrant and native entrepreneurs referred to the general liquidity problems and market downturn, ranging from the banks' reluctance in providing business loans, to the overall chain effect of the collapse of the construction industry, or to the fact that customers now ask widely for credit while suppliers demand to be paid in cash.

Apart from these clearly economic in character problems, some 66 % of the migrants and 58 % of Greeks mentioned problems related to state policies, public administration and regulatory mechanisms, including high taxation, high social security contributions, and to a lesser extent bureaucracy. Bureaucracy in particular may not have score high in our survey itself, but was omnipresent in the discussions we have held on the field and in our in-depth interviews with immigrants, especially regarding past experiences of entrepreneurs from both groups, for example as far as business start up and licencing was concerned. For migrant entrepreneurs in particular, it was not widely mentioned as a problem related to the function and performance of the business as such, but came up the major problem they have to deal with at a personal level in sorting out their migratory status. This puts an additional burden on immigrants, and affects the business indirectly, alongside the purely financial impact of the crisis. In the next few paragraphs we briefly outline the stories of three of participants, one in each of the three neighbourhoods of our study, in order to highlight different aspects of the way the institutional framework of migratory policy affects both personal/family livelihoods and business performance amidst the crisis.

Case Study A

Carolina is a 40 years old single mother from Romania. She first worked in Crete in hotels and restaurants during the summer season, returning back to her parents' place for the winter, and managed to buy an apartment in Romania. In 1999, she decided to move to Athens to look for more stable work.

She worked for about 10 years in a pizza chain, but worsening relationships with her managers (resulting in several moves around different branches across the city) led her to the decision to begin something of her own, which she could possibly inherit to her son, currently a technical high school pupil. In 2009 she started a minimarket, which she financed through a bank loan of 20,000 (buying-off the business alone costed her 15,000 euros).

Although she mentioned serious problems in sorting out her documents, in travelling back and forth and in bringing her son over in the past, these have been solved since 2007, when Romania became an EU member-state. Carolina acknowledged that her decision to start up her own business depended crucially on the fact that she had become and EU citizen, both in terms of the paperwork and in terms of the ability to receive a bank loan.

Her business was going smoothly in the first couple of years, but there has been a considerable drop in sales lately («I only sell cigarettes now», she said). In trying to cope with her significantly reduced income and her family and business expenses, including the loan, Carolina works informally from 21:00 to 01:00 as a dishwasher in a local souvlaki fast-food owned by an Albanian for 15 €.

Case Study B

Artan arrived in Greece in 1994, after completing his studies as a veterinarian in Tirana, Albania. He first headed to Crete, where his brother already lived and where they were latter joined by other relatives. He worked initially in

construction and latter as a taylor in Athens. He is married, with two children studying in a prestigious private school with financial support covering their fees.

In 2006, after having worked for several years in a clothing manufacture and learned well the trade, he decided to be his own boss and start up a business. He became a taylor, fixing clothes and providing laundry services on his own, sometimes with the (informal) help of his wife.

Having been on successive 2-year residence permits for paid employment, he was eligible for a special permit for Independent Economic Activity and submitted an application. He received a negative response a year latter, justified on the grounds that he was not employing any personell. In the meantime, he was not allowed to be formally employed in any other job. He subsequently submitted a second application, but an amendment to the Law now requested a deposit of 60,000 euros in a bank account as start-up capital, which he strove to collect through relatives and friends. About 3 years latter, in 2009, his application was also rejected and he decided to bring the case to justice. Court procedures are still ongoing, and in the meantime he holds a renewable certificate stating that his case is being processed, which grants him a status of temporary legality but does not alow him to travel to Albania and renders his business semi-legal. Artan is worried about this situation, even more because his business is going well despite the crisis:

> You need to work and they don't let you, I pay my OAEE [contributions] for 7 years now, and still does not have a residence permit!

Moreover, he complained specifically about mal advice and corruption among public servants in his local municipal department, who had explicitly asked for a bribe to handle his permit – which he knows is not the case in other municipal branches:

> Here state officers do not respect the law, like the law is not the same for everyone, you pay 10,000 euros and you get your permit immediately! It does not cost too much at the end of the day, because you end up loosing more money with a delay of 3–4 years! It's not much compared to what I lost and still need to pay to lawyers!...

Case Study C

Usama arrived in Greece in 1982 at the age of 18, after graduating from high school in Sudan. He first settled in the island of Skyros, where he worked for years before moving to Athens in 1999. He is married to a Sudanese lady and have two children, a high school pupil and a polytechnic student.

He started a laundrette in soon after moving to Athens, which back then used to work well. When the Immigration Law changed in 2005, providing special permits for Independent Economic Activity, he applied and got this type of permit on the basis of his business activity. However, in 2007 he had a serious car accident leaving him with a permanent disability which does not allow him to be standing for long hours, as the laundry business required. He therefore closed down the laundrette and started up an internet and call centre, offering

also computer and mobile accessories and repair services. He soon discovered that his permit was tied to the laundry activity and that the Law had not forseen the possibility of activity change.

Usama has since then entered a Kafkian situation of constant fight with the bureaucracy. He described us his successive visits from immigration services to the Municipal business licencing department, to tax authorities and social security branches, all asking him to provide a series of documents on his old and new business, his residence and legal status, his tax and social security record, and his health condition, only to move back again to the start. In 2009, he thought he could bypass this by applying for a 10-years residence permit instead, but was lacking about 2 weeks of proven legal residence in Athens and could not make use of his years in the island; in the meanwhile his semi-legal status does not classify him for completing this application. Complaining also about xenophobia and desinformation at the municipal immigration department, he then decided to bring the case to justice, but without an outcome to date, and in the meantime holds a certificate stating that his case is being processed.

The crisis made things worse, as the business is not going well. For the last year or so, Usama has not been able to pay his rent and bills for both the business and his family apartment, neither for his social security contributions. In our interview, he was desperate about being forced to operate illegally and expressed the will to leave Greece for good.

The cases examined here clearly show different layers of how the institutional factor affects immigrant entrepreneurs and their businesses, and of how this intersect with the financial and market conditions at the time of the crisis. All cases are typical of small businesses that are closely tied to their owners and form part of their families projects and strategies for generating income – a model which resembles that of equivalent Greek-owned SMEs in the very same areas where this ones are located. The experience of Usama reveals that the bureacratic Leviathan that characterises the Greek administration at large may turn really nasty for immigrants, even if they had been living and working in the country legally for a long time. Worsening market conditions in the last few years, render living impossible and force some towards informality as a survival option. Similar, though not as desperate, is the experience of Artan. In his case, however, the crisis has not affected severly the business to date, leading him to consider the possibility of bribe in order to proceed with his documents as part of a cost-benefit calculation for the sake of his own legal status as well as the performance of his business. Moreover, the deficiencies of the Greek public sector in both cases have been highlighted from the top level of «high» policy, to the grounded level of individual officers who do not appear to know the Law or bypass it by deliberately misinforming immigrants on the basis of xenophobic prejudice and sometimes benefit from their institutional vulnerability through practices of corruption. By contrast, Carolina's example stands exceptional as indicative of the multiple benefits a secure legal status may have in a migrant's dealings with the bureaucracy and legal framework. In order to keep her businesses running, however, amidst severe drops in dales due to the crisis,

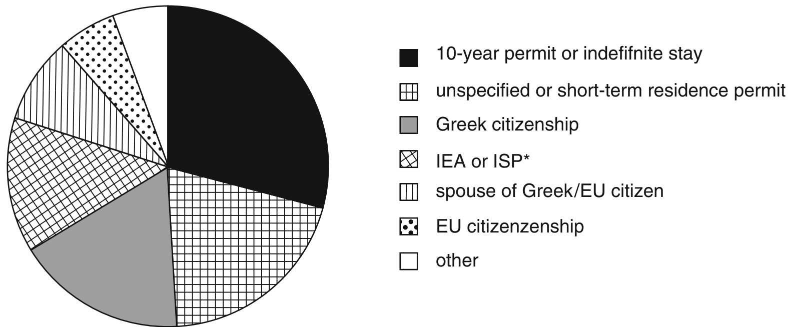

Fig. 3 Legal status of immigrant entrepreneurs in Athens (Source: Fieldwork research)

she retreats to the informal economy, overworking part of her free time also as an «investment» for the future of her son.

Returning back to our survey results, a closer look on the legal status of immigrant entrepreneurs, illustrated on Fig. 3, is revealing of the wider picture regarding the impact of the institutional factor. Ten of our respondents did not specify the type of residence permit they were holding, and one response is entirely missing. Another ten were on a 10-year residence permit, though one was awaiting result on his application, holding a temporary certificate. Four had a permit for indefinite stay. Nine were granted Greek citizenship (in most cases recently), and three are citizens of new EU member states (Bulgaria and Romania). Three are spouses of Greeks and one of a Romanian citizen. One holds the special identity card issued to ethnic Greeks from Albania, while two have the status of a refugee. Only three were holders of a permit for Independent Economic Activity or Independent Services or Projects, and another three were only holding the aforementioned certificates stating their cases are being processed.

Clearly, even considering the information we missed, the majority of immigrant entrepreneurs are subject to a secure and long term or even permanent status: from Greek and EU citizenship and indefinite stay, to 10-years permits. This obviously suggests that the likelihood of businesses start ups is also related to migratory status, and that state policy may or may not indirectly facilitate entrepreneurial activity among immigrants, depending on the degree and conditions of access it provides to a secure and stable migratory status. One should expect that, since the Law acknowledges the possibility of migrants to be involved in independent economic activity, and provides for a special residence permit applying to this category for migrants, things should be easier for those who may wish and are able to make this step. The examples stemming from the life stories of our interviewees as outlined above offer little support to this argument. In fact, Law 3386 of 2005 and its more recent amendments, maintain both the problematic clauses experienced by our interviewees: in order to be issued a permit for Independent Economic Activity (IEA), the applicant should hold a minimum capital of at least 60,000 euros in a bank account (article 24, paragraph 1a); while the permit is valid for 2 years and

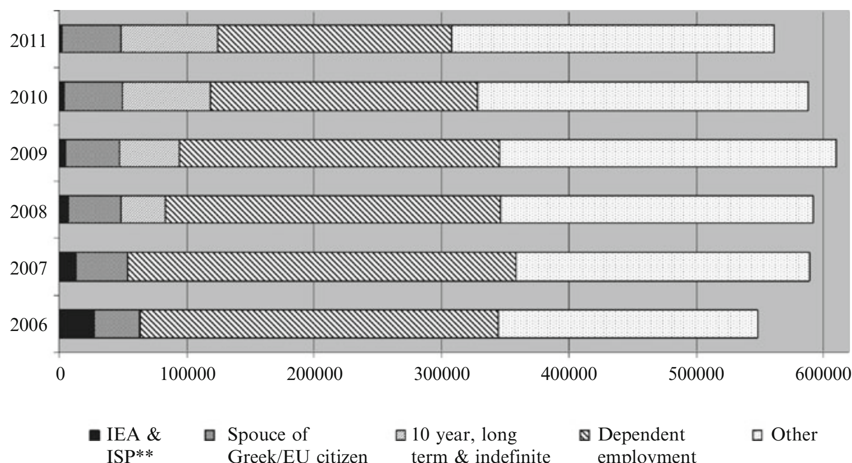

Fig. 4 Valid residence permits*, by type, 2006–2011 (Source: Ministry of Interior, Data on residence permits, by type, 2006–2011) **Excluding EU-27 citizens for all years, **IEA = Residence permit for Independent Economic Activity, ISP = Residence permit for Independent Services or Projects*

may be renewed for another 2 years based, among other conditions, on the maintenance of the same activity for which it was originally granted (article 25, paragraph 3a). The Law came to address a real need, but had not provided for the long-term status, which may be necessary for entrepreneurs, nor had it foreseen a situation like the one imposed by the crisis, which would makes the 60,000 euros requirement an impossible criterion, while remains irrationally blind to the possibility of activity change. Expectedly then, looking at the overall data on residence permits across Greece, illustrated in Fig. 4, the shares of 2-year permits issued for IEA or Independent Services or Projects (ISP, applying to self-employed or free-lancers) have been declining over the past 6 years, while those suggesting some more stable, long-term or permanent status have been considerably increasing. It is in these categories, as well as in the recent citizenship acquisitions, that one should now look for migrant entrepreneurs in Greece, as our study revealed, since those supposedly designed for them are not simply difficult for immigrants to get in the context of the crisis, but may put them in additional unnecessary trouble as in the cases described in this section.

5 Conclusion

Based on a review of empirical literature and of up-to-date statistics, and drawing mostly from ongoing fieldwork research in Athens that involves a combination of qualitative and qualitative methods, this chapter attempted to sketch the emerging picture in respect to immigrant entrepreneurship in Greece at the time of a

deepening financial crisis and harshening austerity policies under the country's joint IMF-EU-ECB supervision. The research is situated within the theoretical debate on ethnic entrepreneurship in the literature, particularly regarding the historical experience of economic crisis in Europe following the 1970s oil-shocks, druing which many migrants shifted from waged work to independent economic acticities in response to structural changes in the productive and employment base and rising unemployment in the sectors they were traditionally employed in the post-war era. Building on this, our study posed the question whether immigrants in contemporary Greece may follow in great numbers similar pathways to entrepreneurship and self-employment to overcome shrinking opportunities in the labour market.

Our review of empirical literature and official statistics revealed a rapid rise of migrant entrepreneurship in recent years, even since the 2009 when the crisis first hit the country's economy, and that this growth of immigrant businesses is even more pronounced in Athens, the urban economy and space of which have been undergoing multiple processes of change over the past decades. Following earlier arguments in the literature on immigrants' entrepreneurship in Greece, we also locate the phenomenon within a dual set of dynamics: on the one hand, the complex trends of migration and immigrants' settlement and incorporation in Greece and Athens; on the other, the wider processes of economic, social and spatial change in Athens. These latter take a problematic turn in the context of the crisis, which goes beyond worsening market conditions and relate also to the alleged downgrading of parts of the central Athenian space, or to open racist mobilisation against immigrants. We have chose to focus on the institutional factors affecting immigrant entrepreneurs and their businesses.

Our empirical findings to date confirm the recent emergence of ethnic economies on the urban space of Athens, but suggest that these have been rather based on trends preceeding the crisis. Our preliminary analysis of results maintaned a comparative frame between immigrant-owned shops and businesses in the three neighbourhoods of our study, and their local greek counterparts. This comparison allowed us to observe a number of differences in the profile of both businesses and entrepreneurs: e.g. the ageing of Greek business owners as compared to immigrant entrepreneurs, and the resulting more established character of their businesses, the higher educational profile of the migrants, contrasted to the greater relevance of qualifications to business activity in the case of Greeks, the ethnic character of most immigrant businesses, etc. At the same time, however, it brough to the fore a number of commonalities, such as the family character of the majority of ventures and the importance of informal family labour and support, the primarily local scope of most, or the similar ways in which e.g. drops in consumption and liquidity problems amidst the crisis may hamper the performance of both. It also highlighted aspects of the role of the state and of the insitutional and regulatory framework, such as high taxation, high social security contributions and state bureaucracy.

These, alongside austerity measures that were repeatedly mentioned especially by our Greek inetrlocutors, seem to be common for both categories of entrepreneurs even if in vaying ways. Reducing bureaucratic pressures by simplifying procedures

for start ups, licencing, etc. and fostering incentives for SMEs through lowering taxes and social security, have been suggested by many during the fieldwork and sound as rational claims against the State. The latter, however, applying austerity packages characterised by a blend of cutting costs and generating income, and without any proof to date of steps away from the rigidness and polynomy of the institutional framework, appears to have an overarching presence haunting the performance of SMEs owned by immigrants and locals alike. At the same time, however, the state appears to abandon its regulatory role, e.g. by applying controls and maintaining standards of fair business pracice and competition.

Immigrants in particular are far more vulnerable to both governmental policies and the bureacracy of public administration, due to the very condition of being subjects to a fragmented, shortsighted and largely contradictory legal framework. The stories of our immigrant interviewees are indicative of bureaucratic corridors under the spectre of xenophobia; the state is omnipresent in determining their lives, while it remains absent from any positive measure facilitating integration in the long run. Migratory status remains a basic but necessary step towards the incorporation of immigrants, and a minimum condition for the economic performance of those among them who decide to engage in entrepreneurial activity at a time of crisis.

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