

**dr hab. Milena Ratajczak-Mrozek, prof. UEP**

**Poznań University of Economics and Business**

**Institute of International Business and Economics**

**Department of International Marketing**

**Review of the doctoral dissertation “Characteristics, Conditions and Scope of  
Refugee Entrepreneurship in the Example of Sweden”**

**authored by mgr Nina Łazarczyk-Bilal**

**under the supervision of prof. dr hab. Beata Glinka,  
and associate supervision of dr Agnieszka Brzozowska  
University of Warsaw, Faculty of Management**

The review has been prepared under the regulations of the Legal Act of Law on Higher Education and Science, according to which:

“Art. 187. 1. A doctoral dissertation shall present the candidate's general theoretical knowledge in a discipline or disciplines and the ability to independently conduct scientific or artistic work.

2. The subject of the doctoral dissertation is an original solution to a scientific problem, an original solution in the field of applying the results of own scientific research in the economic or social sphere, or an original artistic achievement.”

**Aim and research problem of the dissertation**

The reviewed dissertation addresses the relevant problem of refugee entrepreneurship. The aim of the dissertation is “to study the determinants of the refugee entrepreneurial intention in the host country” and “to examine the impact of the migration status on the formation of

entrepreneurial intention” (p. 20). The specific research problem is (p. 19) “the analysis of the determinants of entrepreneurial intention of refugees hosted in Sweden since 2010s”. Additionally, the Author asks several research questions “1. What are the determinants of refugee entrepreneurial intention in the host country? 1a. What are the individual determinants of refugee entrepreneurial intention? 1b. What are the contextual background determinants of refugee entrepreneurial intention? 2. How does the refugee migration status impact the formation of entrepreneurial intention? 2a. What are the differences between refugee migration category and other migration categories across the identified determinants of entrepreneurial intention?” (p. 20). The thesis has also four theoretical and two practical goals. The theoretical goals include: “to push forward the mixed embeddedness theory” (p. 21), “to contribute to the refugee entrepreneurship field” (p. 21), “to move forward the analyses of differences between refugees and other categories of immigrants” (p.21), “to test the already existing theories applied within refugee entrepreneurship research” (p. 22). As far as practical goals are concerned the thesis aims to “formulate a series of testable hypotheses applicable to future studies and contexts” (p.22) and to “examine the research problem related to the determinants of refugee entrepreneurial intention in the context of Sweden” (p.22).

The aims and goals are relevant for a doctoral dissertation and the addressed aim and research problem of the dissertation are much up-to-date. The research presented in the thesis was conducted before the outbreak of the war in Ukraine but nowadays, when the review is being prepared, Poland and other European countries face a big wave of Ukrainian immigrants, and discussions are conducted, on how to induce their entrepreneurial behaviours. This makes the subject and research problem addressed by the Doctoral candidate highly important, even though She conducts the analysis based on different ethnic groups and in a different (than Poland) country context.

The Author presents a good justification for the choice of Sweden as the research context (in chapter 2.7). She managed to convincingly present a justification of the country’s context, all the related data and scientific studies.

The analysed scientific problem is rather of practical importance. Therefore, even the part of the Introduction titled “Arriving at the research problem” is much grounded in the presentation of statistical information on refugees. This approach when empirical analysis drives the theoretical one does not diminish the value of the dissertation itself. Especially since the Author has conducted a relevant theoretical review of the literature as well. Most importantly it proves that the Doctoral candidate addresses a relevant practical scientific problem in Her work.

### **Structure of the thesis and the general readability**

The structure of the dissertation is typical and correct for a doctoral dissertation. It contains five chapters, where Introduction is numbered as chapter 1 and Conclusions as chapter 5. Chapter 2 is theoretical and covers the review of the literature on the entrepreneurial intention of refugees. Chapter 3 describes the empirical analysis of the determinants of refugee entrepreneurial intention, including both quantitative and qualitative analyses, whereas chapter 4 presents the discussion of the research findings. The structure is correct and logical. The only minor remark is that in chapter 3 too many detailed levels of subchapters are used (e.g. number 3.4.5.2.1 with even additional subheadings) which does not help the readability of the thesis structure.

Generally, the dissertation is well and carefully written in terms of language and style. There are only some minor remarks, e.g. the use of different fonts in the table of contents or some minor spelling mistakes (e.g. p. 25). This does not undermine the generally very positive assessment of the formal quality of the thesis.

### **Theoretical background and literature review – general knowledge in a discipline**

The thesis is conducted within the refugee entrepreneurship field. It is a strength of the dissertation that it focuses on one particular group of immigrants, namely refugees. From the theoretical point of view, this research is much needed as I do agree with Nina Łazarczyk-Bilal that entrepreneurship provides a way for the economic integration of the refugees in the host country, entrepreneurship enhances the social integration and refugee entrepreneurship contributes to the economy of a host country. Moreover, refugee entrepreneurship as part of more general migrant entrepreneurship is still an under-researched field. As the Doctoral candidate rightly identifies the research gap, which She tries to fill with Her research, there is a lack of studies testing the differences between refugees and other groups of migrants, a lack of comparative method studies on the subject, as well as available studies are not coherent in terms of adopted theories. and conceptualisations Therefore the choice of the problem and the exact explanation of the research gap, ability to identify the current and important research problem, show the Authors' general knowledge in the field and the capability to plan Her own scientific research.

The thesis adopts the mixed embeddedness theory focusing on social embedding. A doctoral dissertation should present familiarity with previous scientific works and general theoretical knowledge in a discipline, which characterises the reviewed thesis. Presented in the thesis theoretical analysis is correct, although not very broad, and some additional summarizing

tables would help to increase the readability of the study. One good example of such a table that I appreciate is table 1 comparing the main characteristics distinguishing refugees from migrant workers in light of the formation of entrepreneurial intention (p. 51).

Although the theoretical analysis of the literature is relatively short, still it is done correctly and proves the general theoretical knowledge of Nina Łazarczyk-Bilal in the discipline of management and quality studies, focusing on entrepreneurial intention, that is a willingness to start a company, refugees entrepreneurship and social embeddedness.

### **Method and empirical analysis – solution to a scientific problem and contribution of the research**

For the empirical analysis, the Doctoral candidate chose the mixed method approach (that is both quantitative and qualitative research), which is well justified and constitutes the strength of the dissertation. The mixed method approach presents a good contribution in itself. I especially appreciate Figure 6 summarizing nicely eight steps in the mixed method empirical research process. The accompanying text shows that the Author consciously planned the whole research process and is aware of its strengths and limitations. This in turn shows that She is able to conduct scientific research independently. Similarly, I appreciate the part. 3.1.3 called justification of methodological choices.

The basis for the empirical analysis and especially the quantitative study is the proposed theoretical model of entrepreneurial intention with a focus on social embedding and willingness to take risks as well as 23 hypotheses developed based on the literature review.

As far as the theoretical model of refugee entrepreneurial intention and formulation of 23 hypotheses is concerned several comments need to be made. First, it would be helpful if all the hypotheses would be presented in one figure and not only in a table. This would allow to show all the interdependencies between the hypotheses and actually how complicated and not always clear these interdependencies are. Some of these interdependencies are presented in empirical models, but again, not all in one. The question arises, if really all 23 hypotheses were needed and if they were drawn by the theoretical model or just by the accessed database from Sweden.

Second, it would be much clearer if the theoretical model included all determinants which are part of the hypotheses. I lack a good and clear presentation of the links between all the 23 hypotheses and the model itself. The model includes entrepreneurial intention which is determined by human capital, personal characteristics and willingness to take a risk. Personal characteristics and willingness to take risks depend on social embedding. And all of these

factors are mitigated by the refugee migration category. But in the hypotheses, entrepreneurial intention depends on a willingness to take risks, leadership aspiration, professional self-confidence, previous self-employment and commitment to place. So my question is, with which category from the model commitment to place is linked and why there is no human capital in the hypotheses? Or maybe some of the factors are linked to personal traits and some to human capital, and if yes – which ones? Additionally, in the hypotheses, there are tested determinants of willingness to take risks (again commitment to place and trust in the host state), determinants of commitment to place (perceived access to opportunities and social support), determinants of perceived access to opportunities (barriers preventing participation in social activities, acceptance of mainstream social norms, trust in the host country, perceived access to the mainstream social network) and 9 hypotheses on factors of refugee migration status. I believe that if the model was more visibly linked to the hypotheses, the whole following data analysis would have a better logical flow. I am aware that some factors mentioned above can be assigned to social processes and factors and thus to the social embeddedness, but a clearer presentation of the links would be much appreciated. Some of these doubts are clarified in the methodological section where predictor variables are presented, in this case, we see e.g. the category of social embedding-related variables (p. 92).

Third, in both of the studies, the importance of commitment to place comes into view, even though it directly was not part of the theoretical model. Conducted quantitative analysis showed that commitment to place influences entrepreneurial intention directly (as proven in study one, figure 17) and indirectly through the impact on willingness to take risks (as in study two, figure 28). Therefore, I would like to know a more elaborative explanation of this result. Should this be linked to the concept of territorial embeddedness from the economic geography?

The two quantitative studies presented in the dissertation are based on the two secondary data sets from Sweden. Although the Author uses secondary data sets, in my opinion, it does not undermine the value of Her research. First of all, although based on secondary data sets, She individually and independently conducts statistical data analysis and interprets the results. Second of all, the Doctoral Candidate by herself conducted the qualitative study and proved her ability to conduct independently the whole research process. And foremost, in my opinion, the choice of a mixed method approach constitutes a big strength as it shows that the Doctoral candidate knows the strengths and weaknesses of both types of research methods and knows how to combine them in order to get the most insightful results.

The qualitative study included 12 semi-structured interviews. I have to agree with this choice of this method as the qualitative method allows one to study why and how different phenomena and processes occur. Moreover, the knowledge gained from qualitative studies presents the perspective of social actors under investigation which is important when analysing the problem of immigrant or refugee entrepreneurship.

In my opinion, the qualitative study constitutes the strength of this doctoral thesis. It is not easy to conduct studies among refugees and the Doctoral candidate managed to do so. She adopted the right procedure and additionally is aware of its limitations. The interview results are insightful and interesting. I appreciate part 3.4.4 "The Research ethics" as this is important with all qualitative studies and especially with studies conducted among refugees. Similarly, figure 30 presenting a code tree of the determinants of refugee entrepreneurial intention, as well as the description of the results with the quotes from the interviewees both constitute the strength of the study.

The whole empirical analysis is conducted thoughtfully and I need to underline that the issues raised above do not undermine the overall positive assessment of the presented analysis and findings. The obtained results are not only interesting but also relevant for the theory, business and policy practice alike.

The dissertation expands the knowledge on the formation of refugee entrepreneurial intention by adopting the social embedding theory. The formation of entrepreneurial intention is crucial for refugees in the host country and should bring positive outcomes for both individuals and at the macroeconomic level. Interestingly, the Author writes "Although the response related to entrepreneurial intention is high among the interlocutors, the interviews revealed that starting a company was not a top priority for most of them" and "entrepreneurial intention was only a vague, long-term and low priority plan". So the question for further research arises, how does really intention translate to entrepreneurial actions and how to foster these actions among refugees?

Based on the studies the Author proposes also the career embedding concept, defined as "a social phenomenon of getting embedded or re-embedded in the professional career in the host country" (Abstract). If this concept is supposed to be widely used I would suggest further and more detailed conceptualisation. The idea is appealing, but it should be further conceptualised. Maybe some insights from the paper by Lassalle et al. (2020, "Migrant entrepreneurship and markets: The dynamic role of embeddedness in networks in the creation of opportunities") linking the processes of embedding in networks (proximation) and de-embedding from networks (distanciation) could be used in this future research.

The obtained results point out some differences between refugees and other categories of migrants, which lie in their willingness to take risks, mental health state and experience social barriers. This result shows that indeed analysis of refugee entrepreneurship as part of migrant entrepreneurship is a needed and possibly fruitful avenue of research.

As far as research results are concerned, I appreciate that the Doctoral candidate is aware of the limitations of the study and She formulates directions for further research. This always states the maturity of the researcher.

### **Final opinion**

In my opinion, the dissertation presents the Candidate's general theoretical knowledge in the discipline of management and quality studies (*dyscyplina nauki o zarządzaniu i jakości*) especially concerning the problem of immigrant and refugee entrepreneurship as well as social embeddedness. The biggest strength of the dissertation is the mixed method approach and the qualitative research. The latter presents a high level of rigour in the methodological approach and proves the Doctoral candidate's ability to conduct scientific work. I believe that the presented doctoral dissertation is an original solution to a scientific problem of determinants of refugee entrepreneurship focusing on social embeddedness with the research conducted in the context of Sweden. Therefore, it can be stated that the scientific work prepared by Nina Łazarczyk-Bilal meets the general requirements of the doctoral dissertation and can be presented for defence procedure for the award of the doctoral degree.

Milena Ratajczak-Mrozek

dr hab. Milena Ratajczak-Mrozek, prof. UEP