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**Migrant construction workers' tactics to
cope with unemployment during the crisis**

Case study on Albanian immigrants in Milan and Athens

Doctoral dissertation by

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*To my family and the idea of Aetorachi
which infused me with an interest in humanity, migration and society*

*Στην οικογένειά μου και στην ιδέα της Αετοράχης
που μου εμφύσησαν ενδιαφέρον για τον άνθρωπο, τον μετανάστη, την κοινωνία*

In memory of my beloved cousin Iraklis Chalkidis who left us so early

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Introduction

This dissertation presents a comparative study of Albanian migrant construction workers in Italy and Greece. Using qualitative research methods, it explores the coping practices of first-generation Albanian migrants employed in the residential construction in Milan and Athens during the recent financial crisis. More specifically, this study focuses on the responses adopted by Albanian builders and their households to cope with high rates of unemployment in construction in both contexts. My research started on March 2015 and involved 16 months of fieldwork in both contexts, where I mainly interviewed three categories of informants: workers, trade unionists and labour inspectors.

Twenty-five years on since the first “exodus” of Albanians to European countries (Van Hear, 1998), there is no doubt that Albanian emigration has entered a new phase, triggered by a new crisis that, this time, takes places not only in the home country, but within the two countries that have received the greater number of Albanian migrants: Greece and Italy. As will be presented in Chapter 1, various crises within Albanian national territory and Kosovo war have brought about massive emigration episodes at different times. Nowadays, the impact that the economic crisis in neighbouring Greece and Italy have on immigrants’ employment seems to herald a new period in Albanian migration patterns.

Studies on recent recession and migration have belied hypothesis predicting a mass return of immigrants back to their countries of origin (Awad, 2009; Koser, 2009, Papademetriou *et al.*, 2010). On the other hand, it has been indicated that economic crisis affected even more immigrants’ home countries, and many migrants would opt to stay put in the destination country, instead of returning. This assumption is partially true for Albanian emigrants. Gemi (2016) has argued that many Albanians residing in Italy have opted to stay put in the receiving country, instead of returning back to Albania. However, returns of Albanian immigrants residing in Greece were numerous, and many individuals opted to return back to Albania; even if their project failed, and they opted to re-emigrate once again: to Italy, to Greece or to another country.

Fiscal crisis in Greece started off in 2009, and it “*soon turned into a sovereign debt crisis*” opening up a long and deep recession period (Matsaganis, 2013, p.152). After an eight-year period of fast economic growth, the Greek economy has been in recession for consecutive years since 2009, and Greek citizens’ standards of living have deteriorated. From 2010 onwards, the Greek governments have signed three Memorandums of Economic and Fiscal policies to boost competitiveness and reverse the rise in unemployment, reducing simultaneously public expenditure through cuts of public sector’s wages and pensions, and shrinking of welfare

provisions. Signs of recovery have been shown between 2012 and 2014, when Greece's Gross Domestic Product decreased once again. In 2014, Greece's economy went into recession another time, and it has been marked a recovery since the third quarter of 2015 (Hellenic Statistical Authority, 2016).

Under these circumstances, Greek construction has been the sector that suffered by far the most massive losses during the last years. According to the most recent data from the Hellenic Statistical Authority (2017), the number of private building permits and the volume of private building activities dropped by almost 85% from 2007 to 2016. Maroukis (2013) argues that this decrease has implicated on immigrant household incomes and Albanian immigration in Greece, since construction offered job opportunities to a big number of Albanian males. Greek families were not able anymore to sustain investments in the Greek real estate markets or financing new building projects.

Italy has not remained immune to the global financial crisis of 2008. From 2008 to 2014, the Italian Gross Domestic Product growth decreased in five years out of seven; its minimum value of 5,5% has been in 2009. The crisis touched particularly Italian banks that had to reduce credits to clients, and it thus limited small and medium sized firms' viability (Di Quirico, 2010). Regarding the public finance, the reduced creditworthiness of clients and low economic activity resulted also in budget deficit and public debt increase. In this context, Italian governments opted to support banks and cut public spending in order to shield national economy, and protect and maintain jobs. However, it may be underlined that there have been big differences between crisis effects on Northern and Southern regions, in the sense that unemployment rates and GDP decrease have been more acute in the South (Svimez, 2015).

From 2008 to 2015, investments in residential construction for new buildings have decreased by 62,4%, although investments for extraordinary maintenance work have increased by 19,4% (ANCE, 2014; 2017). The same report presents data indicating that 44,5% of formal construction labourers became unemployed from 2009 to 2014, whereas in 2015 there was an increase in the number of construction workers registered with the Builders' Funds (Casse Edili) by almost 7%. Estimations on underground economy in construction indicate also a raise of 15,5% by 2012.

Concerning the research subjects of this study, Albanian immigrants in Italy and Greece are third country nationals in the EU, and they may be provided the right to work when they meet specific criteria (Chapter 1). Since June 2014, Albania is an official candidate for accession to the European Union, whereas Albanians have been given the right to travel across the Schengen space since 2011.

Interest in migrant construction workers has been demonstrated by various qualitative studies, mainly in the late 1990s and 2000s. In Italy, research has usually concentrated on migrant builders' insertion in the informal sector of construction (see for instance Reyneri, 1998; King and Mai, 2004), whereas in Greece the focus has been on migrant workers' engagement in informality and organization of their work (Psimmenos, 1998; Maroukis, 2009; Maroukis, Iglicka, and Gmaj, 2011), and transnational movements (Maroukis and Gemi, 2013). With respect to informal employment, literature on migrant builders in Italy has usually put emphasis on the connection between informality and migratory status or migrants' networks, without shedding light on the various forms that informal work may take, and the interplay between them and migrants' individual characteristics or subjective motivations. In the Greek case, Psimmenos (2003), Maroukis (2009), and Maroukis and colleagues' (2011) works have been an exception, underlying how cultural values, household position and ethnicity may influence migrants' agency when engaged in informal work relations. In Italy, Perrotta's (2011) work on Romanian builders dealt with migrants' lives and explored their involvement in informality taking into consideration migrants' cultural and historical background, and analysing thoroughly labour relations in a construction site.

As far as it concerns migrant workers' responses to cope with unemployment, many studies have illustrated practices adopted by immigrants to get by during economic crisis (see for instance in Italy: Sacchetto and Vianello, 2013; Ambrosini, Coletto and Guglielmi, 2014; Sacchetto and Vianello, 2016; in Greece: Maroukis, Iglicka, and Gmaj, 2011; Maroukis and Gemi, 2013; Gemi, 2013; 2014; 2015a; 2016). However, all these studies have usually seen (vulnerable) migrant workers as a homogenous whole hit by economic crisis, but rarely the focus has been on a specific economic sector. The lack of studies that focus exclusively on certain professional groups goes often along with a neglect of the interplay between migrant individual characteristics and identities shaped within a specific sector (for construction see Thiel, 2012a). Hence, this dissertation proposes a comparative research of one migrant group (Albanians), in a specific sector (residential construction) in two different national (Italy and Greece) and local contexts (Milan and Athens). Thus, such an analysis implies holding together the cultural characteristics of Albanian migrants, their work identities as construction workers, as well as national migration regimes, and the specific characteristics presented in each city.

In the light of these preliminary reflections, this research studies a timely topic that has been partially obscured, in both migration academic studies and public debate, by other phenomena, such as by the refugee crisis of the last years in Italy and Greece. It aims to complement and carry forward a line of research on immigration in Southern European countries which has often

proposed a comparative approach to study modes of labour market integration in Italy, Greece and also Spain.

The dissertation concentrates on the case of Italy and Greece as two countries mainly affected by the economic crisis in Europe, and explores the residential construction, as one of the economic sectors hardest hit since 2008. Construction has been the principal sector that permitted Albanian males to access the Italian and Greek labour market, offering numerous (informal) job opportunities. During crisis years, not only Albanian construction workers became unemployed, but they risked also to lose their legal status, due to the restrictive national (Italian and Greek) migration policy regimes. At the same time, economic difficulties in Greece and Italy seem to have caused significant repercussions for the Albanian economy (Gemi, 2016), that may constitute return migration a risky and thorny option.

Milan and Athens have been selected among other Italian and Greek cities for a number of similarities and differences they present. First, the largest figures of Albanian residents are concentrated in Milan and Athens or satellite urban areas. Second, these cities have been the most flourishing centers of construction activity in which Albanian workers have been largely employed. On the other hand, these two urban contexts differ as Milan's construction sector employs migrant construction workers of different nationalities, whereas the construction sector in Athens is mainly dominated by Albanians (almost 80% of the total migrant construction workforce). Then, the regulation of employment in construction in Milan seems to follow Northern European countries' standards, whereas the one in Athens (Greece) shares characteristics of a pro-capitalist regulation of work. Milan is considered a modern European city in which working standards of construction sector are regulated by collective agreements, whereas, in Athens (Greece) collective agreements may take place only on a voluntary basis, and, as a matter of fact, employment terms are now the result of agreements between employment and employees on an individual basis (Koukiadaki and Kokkinou, 2016). Finally, crisis effects in Italy have affected less Northern regions, whereas unemployment rates in Athens (and Attica) followed the national trends.

This dissertation seeks to answer to a general research question that is how Albanian migrant builders respond to unemployment in Italy and Greece. To answer this general question, I structure the thesis around three main issues. Firstly, the focus is on the job recruitment process in the construction sector of Milan and Athens to explore how Albanian builders are able to find job in the building sector, and not become unemployed. Secondly, the research examines the various forms of informal employment in which Albanian construction workers are involved, investigating under which conditions their engagement may be considered an alternative option

to unemployment. The third aim of this study is to shed light on the practices adopted by migrants to cope with unemployment outside the construction sector within the host country, and on their transnational practices. Hence, looking at settled migrants in Italy and Greece, the dissertation explores how the economic crisis and the decrease in construction activity have affected their livelihoods. The research questions that this study addresses are:

- What are the factors that enable Albanian builders to carry on being employed in residential construction?
- What does Albanian builders' capacity to turn their engagement in informal employment into reliable responses to crisis depend upon?
- Which practices have been adopted by Albanian migrants and their families to cope with recession effects? What is the relevance of transnational mobility in the respect?

The first research question concerns the job recruitment process in Milan and Athens. The aim is to provide an analysis of how immigrants get a job using both formal and informal channels of recruitment. What is the importance of Albanians migrants' networks during the economic crisis? What the relevance of informal intermediaries for Albanian builders when getting a job in residential construction? Can migrants keep finding job opportunities in open public places? Do labour agencies offer solutions to unemployed migrants to re-insert in the construction labour market? Might other formal channels of recruitment such as newspapers or internet be of relevance in this respect? By exploring all these sub-questions, I aim to draw conclusions on the resources that migrants have mobilised to remain employed in residential construction and the constraints that they have to overcome to reach their goals.

The second question aims to cast light on the nature of informal activities, the reasons for which Albanians are involved in such phenomena, as well as the power relations that exist within informal employment. Examining the different types of informality in which Albanian builders are enmeshed, I aim to explore the reasons for which some migrants may bargain more efficiently conditions and terms within informal economy than others. Which are the determinants of migrants' negotiation power when they undertake informal economic activities?

The last point of attention is Albanian migrants and their households' practices to cope with crisis effects in Milan and Athens. Here, the focus is on responses outside the construction sector in the host country. How did Albanian families resist during the crisis when male breadwinners became unemployed? How the creation of new transnational spaces may contribute to provide alternative solutions to Albanian households?

Chapter 1 assesses the literature on Albanian migration patterns, focusing on movements towards Italy and Greece, and provides statistical information related to migrants' presence. It then analyses the two contexts of the migrant-receiving countries, discussing also the characteristics of Milan and Athens as distinct fieldwork contexts. It also presents the structural hallmarks of the residential construction in both cities. The second part of this chapter offers a theoretical introduction focusing on the classic approaches developed within research on labour migration. It sets out also the main theoretical framework within which are inserted the main theories on migration, and introduces the main concepts used throughout the dissertation.

Chapter 2 looks in detail at research methods adopted in this study. It highlights the comparative approach and the sampling strategy of this research, pointing out the challenges during the fieldwork. It presents also the interview and the data analysis processes, and the subjective positionality of the researcher in the field. It then discusses the research limitations and some ethical issues related to the research subjects.

Chapter 3 through to 5 constitute the empirical heart of this dissertation. Based on the literature review in Chapter 1, and discussing more in depth the theoretical contributions, in these three chapters I use the empirical material collected during the fieldwork to answer to the research questions.

Chapter 3 analyses the empirical results of the fieldwork focusing on the ways through which Albanian builders get a job within the residential construction sector. This chapter examines the job recruitment process, that is the formal and informal channels that migrants use to find a job, aiming to find out what determines the successful job search in construction during the recession period.

In Chapter 4, the attention turns to informal working arrangements within residential construction. It starts with a brief literature review on the prevalence of informal work in Italy and Greece, highlighting its incidence in construction and its connection with migrant workers. The chapter explores the various forms of informality in which migrants are engaged, and how power implicates better opportunities for employment. Acknowledging the limited resources that migrants may mobilize in order to take benefit of such patterns, I show what are the factors that permit migrants to increase their bargaining power, and exploit better opportunities.

Chapter 5 continues exploring Albanians' coping practices during the economic crisis, but it focuses on responses beyond the construction; outside the spectrum of building trades in two contexts. On the one hand, it examines how Albanian migrants and their families get by within the host country during the recent years. On the other hand, it investigates Albanian workers'

transnational mobility either between the host and home country, or towards other EU countries, as a response to crisis effects.

The dissertation closes by presenting the main findings and contributions, making comparative conclusions by context.

Chapter 1

Background information, theories and concepts

1.1. Background information

1.1.1. Emigration from Albania

Emigration from Albania is not a recent or new phenomenon (Vullnetari, 2012). Still from the Ottoman-empire era, many Albanians used to leave their country to travel to neighbour areas or to long overseas destinations (USA, Argentina, Australia) in order to support financially their families that stayed back home. In this sense, Albanian patterns of migration may be seen as part of the tradition of labour migration from Balkan countries, which characteristics are grouped in the term *kurbet*¹ (Hristov, 2015). Since the 19th century, young males used to leave regularly their home places and move to neighbour regions of Ottoman Empire to gain income and sustain the household. Albanian migrants were usually employed seasonally in agriculture, livestock, and construction, or engaged in more temporary movements to work as craftsmen and merchants. This pattern has been called “*old-fashion temporary migration*” (Badlwin-Edwards, 2002, p. 2), and refers to repetitive mobilities for short or long periods.

Albanian emigration was suspended under the Hoxha regime. During this period, Albania was politically isolated and its citizens were deprived of liberty of free movement. Migration was a prohibited action, and emigrants and their families were punished (Azzarri and Carletto, 2009). Two-thirds of population were living in rural areas and working in the agricultural cooperatives. Agriculture with the industry were the most important economic sectors. In 1990, 82 per cent of the Albanian economically active citizens were employed in these sectors, producing over 80 per cent of overall national production output (King, 2005, p. 136). Whilst poverty and deprivation were widespread problems of the communist Albania, it is during the transition period when extreme poverty overwhelmed Albanian people (King, 2005). Following Hoxha’s death in 1985, economic reforms introduced by Ramiz Alia, and first democratic free elections in 1991 alone could not alleviate people’s indigence, or overmaster their will to savour the images of wealth

¹ In the Albanian case, migration patterns are imbued by notions of masculinity, and power of male body, linked to *kurbet* tradition; a moral value of pride and bravery has been attached on it (Papailias, 2003). Male migrants’ work and labour skills have been considered the means whereby arrival and insertion in the receiving countries’ labour market have been successful (Van Boeschoten, 2015). Hence, as argued in the next chapters, the changing role of women as breadwinners, concurrently with men’s unemployment, could mean a humiliation for their male honour.

and prosperity of West countries arrived through illegally watching of Italian TV stations (Mai, 2001). Under these circumstances, a new era of migration started.

Emigration of Albanians re-emerged after the collapse of the communist regime in a very particular way. Massive outflows were concentrated over a short time span and generated “*a new migration order*” (Van Hear, 1998). Albania was considered “*a laboratory for the study of migration and development*” (King, 2005). In 2001, it was estimated that more than 1 million Albanians had left their country to migrate abroad. Either in a temporary or in a more permanent way, thousands of Albanians migrated from their birth-land to escape unemployment, extreme poverty and lack of opportunities (Arrehag, Sjöberg and Sjöblom, 2006). In this respect, migration for Albanians became a fundamental response of survival.

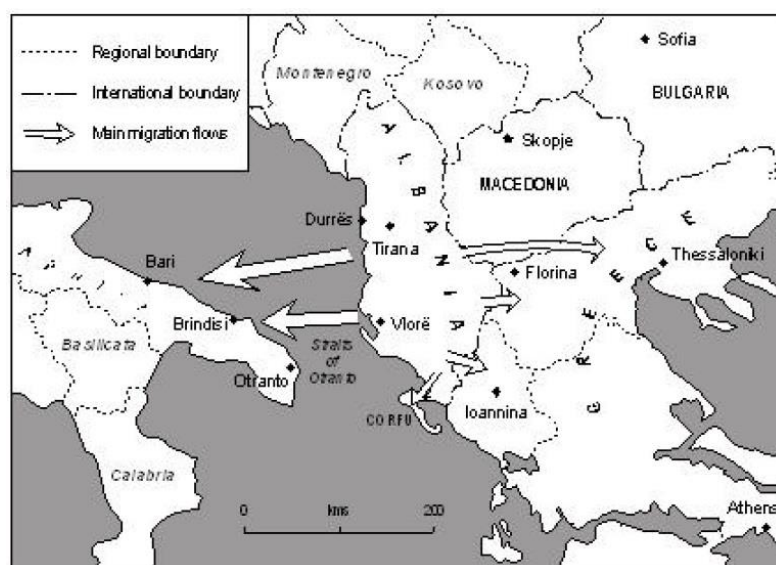
Albanians’ mass exodus occurred in three different periods (Vullnetari, 2012). First mass outflows occurred from 1990 to 1993, after the collapse of Hoxha’s regime. In July 1990, around 5,000 Albanians fled to Germany, Italy and France, and were granted refugee status. Other 45,000 Albanians reached the Italian shores by boat in 1991, whereas thousands of people arrived to Greece walking over the mountains. The second major event that triggered further mobility of Albanians was the collapse of the “pyramid” investment schemes in 1997. A big share of migrants’ remittances from abroad during 1993-1996 had been invested in private “saving” schemes, as a response to the lack of liquidity. In early 1997, due to the non-sustainability of interest rates of these schemes, those failed and caused unrest in the country; even a civil war broke out in some regions. To escape from this chaotic situation, thousands of Albanians fled once again towards two neighbouring countries: Greece and Italy. The third episode was connected to the Kosovo war from 1998 to 1999. The Albanians who escaped from Kosovo entered Albania temporarily, to flee later to various European destinations requesting asylum. Taking advantage of this mobility, many citizens of the Albanian state mixed themselves in with Kosovar asylum seekers, and were granted asylum in various European countries. It has to be noted that all these years, political instability created a negative climate and discouraged foreigners to invest in the country (De Soto *et al.*, 2002), making widespread poverty insist.

Taking into account all three peaks of intensity related to migration outflows from Albania, Barjaba and King (2005) suggested a model of Albanian emigration. According to these authors, this model has four main features. First, migration from Albania was very intense, in the sense that the rates of emigration were very high with respect to other Balkan countries; cumulatively, by then end of 2010, almost 45% of the total resident population had had a migration experience (World Bank, 2011). Second, Albanians’ immigrant status has been characterized by long periods of irregularity, especially in the Greek case. Due to the informality in the local labour markets in

both countries (Reyneri, 2002) and the complexity in administrative procedures, Albanians usually lapsed into irregularity (Gemi, 2013). Third, migration for the majority of Albanians has represented a survival strategy and it was mostly driven by economic reasons. However, it cannot be underestimated the relevance of other motivations such as citizens' contempt for authoritarian culture of control by authorities (King, 2005); young people's will for self-expression (Lubonja, 2001) and quest for self-realisation (Mai, 2002); hunger for escape from insecure environments (especially in northern Albania), where blood feuds still exist (King, 2005). Fourth, Albanians' mobility has been characterized by high rates of circularity, especially in the Greek case. The seasonal character of Albanians' employment and the geographical proximity combined with the fact that Albanians in Greece lapsed frequently into irregularity have generated a "back and forth" migration pattern (Maroukis and Gemi, 2010; 2013; Mai, 2011; Maroukis, Igllicka and Gmaj, 2011).

Focusing now on temporary migration patterns of Albanians, Gemi (2015b, p. 7) illustrates the factors that have particularly influenced transnational mobility. First, she refers to the geographic proximity of Albania with Greece and Italy (Map 1.1), and ease of entry. Second, she points out that the movements may be studied in a "*geopolitical framework and historical/cultural ties of Greece-Albania and Italy-Albania*". Other relevant factors have been immigrant legal status and Albanians' level of socio-economic integration characterised by, at times problematic, integration policies. During the last years, these patterns have been constrained by the crisis effects and the few employment opportunities in both countries, but have been favoured after Albania joined Schengen countries.

Map 1.1 – Albanian migration to Italy and Greece



Source: King and Vullnetari, 2003.

Albanian immigrants in Greece

Albanian migratory mobility to Greece is not such a recent phenomenon. Since the 19th century, Albanians were usually travelling to Greece to work in the textile and agricultural business as seasonal workers (Psimmenos and Kassimati, 2004). These flows continued until 1945, but have been halted during the communist regime in the aftermath of the Second World War (Martin, Martin and Pastore, 2002). Albanian population's movements that interest this dissertation restarted after the collapse of the regime in the 1990s.

Albanian migration towards Greece was undoubtedly favoured by the geographical proximity of the two countries. Notwithstanding the harsh border mountains to cross to reach Greece and the frequent violent treatment by the Greek army (King, Iosifides and Myrivili, 1998), Albanians opted to migrate to the neighbouring country as a survival strategy. Men have been usually the first members to move throughout the Greek national territory, but they were mainly concentrated in and around Athens and Thessaloniki, the two biggest cities in Greece (King and Vullnetari, 2009). Males' mobility was followed by females' one, largely through the institution of family reunification after 2005. Albanian immigrants were employed mainly in the construction, the food and restaurant sector, personal and other services, and agriculture (Iosifides *et al.*, 2007). Albanian women were usually employed in agriculture, domestic and care services, usually informally without any insurance (Baldwin-Edwards 2009; Maroukis 2009), whereas Albanian men found usually work in the construction sector (42%), in agriculture (23%), in industry (12%) and tourism (12%) (Gavalas, Korres, and Giannakos, 2013).

Regarding Albanians' integration within the Greek society, it is to note that over two decades of presence, the level of their integration depends on the specific area of reference. During the first years of migration, Albanians accessed relatively easily the Greek labour market, although their political participation and right to citizenship were rather incomplete (Mai and Schwandner-Sievers, 2003; Gemi, 2016). Their level of integration has been also conditioned by the stance of the Greek state that followed a restrictive migration policy. Nowadays, Albanians are generally considered as "*the 'good' and integrated immigrants of the Greek society*" (Kokkali, 2011, p.162). However, Gemi (2016, p.252) argues that this trend seems to change, due to the economic recession. In particular, the author suggests that Albanians are considering to "*re-establish or strengthen transnational ties to their networks in Albania*" or in Europe in order to find out new job opportunities. Thus, this process might result in a process of dis-integration.

Special mention should be also made of *Vorioepiotes* who are orthodox Albanians coming from southern Albania, but of Greek ethnic origin. *Vorioepiotes* have been treated preferentially as a distinct category of immigrants by the Greek state (Triandafyllidou, 1998), while enjoyed wide

acceptance from the Greek society (Lyberaki and Maroukis, 2005). Ethnic-Greek Albanians have also received a favourable treatment with regard to the acquisition of Greek citizenship, as Table 1.1 indicates. In general, it seems that the number of foreign residents who acquired the Greek citizenship decreases with the onset of economic crisis, and it recovers after the introduction of law 3838/2010 that granted citizenship to second generation migrants (Gemi, 2015).

Table 1.1 – Acquisitions of Greek citizenship from 2006 to 2016

Year	Foreigners of ethnic Greek descent	Other foreigners	Total
2006	570	1.348	1.918
2007	5.823	1.071	6.894
2008	9.946	898	10.844
2009	12.354	612	12.966
2010	6.162	375	6.537
2011	12.616	930	13.546
2012	13.495	1.149	14.644
2013	22.574	1.866	24.440
2014	15.791	2.019	17.810
2015	8.563	1.487	10.050
2016	7.460	3.624	11.084
TOTAL	115.354	15.379	130.733

Source: Ministry of Interior, Greece, and Maroukis, 2013

Albanian immigrants in Italy

The second most attractive destination for Albanian citizens was Italy. Geographical proximity and common strategic, geopolitical and economic interests between Albania and Italy have resulted in bilateral relations (Mai, 2010). The crisis and the collapse of the Albanian communist regime in the 1990s, and the concomitant mass flows of Albanians in the Italian territory instigated a fresh era in Italo-Albanian relations. In March 1991, some 25,700 Albanians reached Italy by boats and rafts of every type (Mai and Paladini, 2013). Following their co-nationals' practice, a new wave of migrants from Albania arrived to Italy in August 1991, but they were repatriated as "illegal" migrants. The following intense mobility to Italy took place after the collapse of pyramid investment schemes in March 1997, mainly crossing Adriatic Sea to reach the Apulian shores.

As it was the case in Greece, males were the first to arrive to Italy. Initially, Albanians were mainly concentrated in big cities such as Rome, Milan, Florence and Turin. Their employment depended largely on regional economic structures (Bonifazi and Sabatino, 2003). In general, Albanians in North Italy were employed in construction and manufacturing, while in the southern regions were usually employed in agriculture and in construction. The low concentration

of Albanians in the service sector has been inter alia due to the low female population in the first years, while this trend changed over the years; now female workforce is usually employed as domestic workers.

As far as Albanians' incorporation within Italian society concerns, it is to note that integration was rather problematic. For many years, Albanian nationality was stigmatized and not accepted. Stigmatization of Albanians was connected with stereotypes about their involvement in criminal acts and uncivility (King and Mai, 2009). Many researchers used the term "Albanophobia" that declared an "irrational fear of all things Albanian" that was "entrenched within the perception" of native population (Lazaridis, 1996, cited in Mai and Paladini, 2013, p. 6-7). This stigmatization has been often promoted by the media (Mai, 2002; Triandafyllidou, 2000; Kokkali, 2011) that contributed to the spread of wide xenophobia and prejudice against Albanian migrants. Nowadays, this image seems to be partially reversed, as Albanians are considered one of the most integrated immigrant groups (Ministero del Lavoro, 2015); thanks to their good knowledge of Italian, their desire to remain in Italy, and adaptation strategies of assimilation they develop, such as mimesis or identity cover up (Romania, 2004; King and Mai, 2009).

With regard to Albanian migrants' integration in Italy², it has been argued that citizenship acquisition has been another strategy towards further integration in the Italian society (Danaj and Çaro, 2016). Indeed, the number of Albanians who acquired the Italian citizenship (Table 1.2) is impressive compared to that of Albanians in Greece (Table 1.1).

Table 1.2 – Acquisitions of citizenship by Albanians in Italy per year

Year	Number
2012	9.493
2013	13.671
2014	21.148
2015	35.134

Source: www.istat.it

² Comparing Albanian migrants' integration in the host society, Vathi (2015, p.83) argues that differences in levels of integration between those residing in Italy and Greece depend on the possibility to access the vocational system, structure of the labour markets and opportunities in each contexts. In particular, de-skilled migrants have continuously failed to recognize their qualifications by the Greek state, and have denied to access vocational programs, whereas in Italy this has been at times achieved.

Number of Albanian immigrants and legal status comparatively

Although it is difficult to calculate the number of Albanian emigrant population, it is estimated that the number of Albanians living abroad in 2010 was 1,705,500 (Vullnetari, 2012), whereas Albania's population in 2016 is 3,038,596 (CIA, 2016). The number of Albanian citizens has increased, since it has been recorded a big number of Albanians who returned voluntarily back to their country during the last years (Gemi, 2016). According to INSTAT and IOM (2014), some 140,000 Albanians returned to Albania from 2001 and 2011; mainly men from Greece (Gemi, 2016). The same research reveals that between 2009-2013 31,650 Albanians have returned from Italy, whereas the number of Albanian returnees from Greece was 94,549. Gemi also argues that, nowadays, the documented Albanians in Italy (495,709) are more than those in Greece (363,649). However, it might not be inferred that Albanians in Greece are less in absolute numbers than those in Italy, since it cannot be easily verified the number of undocumented Albanians in both countries. Indeed, official data from other sources show that the number of Albanian regular migrants has decreased in Greece from 2009 to 2012 by 30 per cent (Table 1.3), whereas the number of stay permits of Albanians in Italy have only slightly decreased during the last years (Table 1.4).

Table 1.3 – Number of stay permits of Albanians and other migrants in Greece (reference month December) per year

Year	Albanians	Other foreign nationals	Total Foreign Population
2005	301.622	150.497	452.119
2006	375.053	172.454	547.507
2007	408.431	180.655	589.086
2008	414.153	178.473	592.626
2009	429.683	181.126	610.809
2010	419.188	177.053	596.241
2011	406.993	175.119	582.112
2012	300.839	139.279	440.118

Source: Ministry of Interior, cited in Gemi, 2015

Table 1.4 – Number and types of stay permits of Albanians in Italy per year

Year	Fixed-term	Long-term	Total
2011	208.531	274.688	483.219
2012	182.558	308.937	491.495
2013	169.259	328.502	497.761
2014	156.311	346.235	502.546
2015	150.102	348.317	498.419
2016	139.377	343.582	482.959

Source: www.istat.it

1.1.2. Immigration to Italy and Greece: cases of a common immigration model?

Immigration patterns in Italy and Greece have shared many common characteristics (King, 2000). The two countries have very similar migration experiences, since they have been suddenly transformed in host countries in the late 1980s and early 1990s. They also responded to the need of immigration policies promoting a series of regularisation schemes. The Italian and Greek economies share also common features, given the rigidly segmented labour markets, pervasive work insecurity, extensive deregulation of the economy and, recently, high unemployment rates. The heterogeneity of immigrants' nationalities was also another key feature of this model. It has been also argued that first migrants were absorbed in specific sectors of the local labour markets, in unskilled, dangerous and low-paid job (Ambrosini and Barone, 2007). Additional common features in both countries were the persistence of informal economies and the demand for irregular labour; the limitation of welfare systems; the fact that both countries had porous borders (Baldwin-Edwards, 2009). All these features were also present in two other Southern European countries: in Spain and Portugal. Such key characteristics led scholars to theorise a new immigration model named as "Southern European Model" of migration (King, 2000, p.11).

Although all these similarities, this model does not seem adequate to explore Albanian migration to Greece and Italy for this dissertation, due to the differences in these two countries; and, additionally, those between Milan and Athens, and the peculiarities of Greek construction. Moreover, this model has been recently criticized as problematic when comparing Southern European countries by one of its introducers and first supporters (Baldwin-Edwards, 1999; 2012). In particular, Baldwin-Edwards (2012) states that Greece seems as an outlier of this model, since immigration policies and migrants' insertion into the labour market has had different characteristics³ and, therefore, integration outcomes should be considered very low. On the other hand, the important role of local governance in policy development and implementation in Italy, as well as the role of NGOs and civil society (especially the Catholic Church) are two factors that do influence migrants' lives, which are completely absent in Greece.

³ In Greece, for instance, the rates of ethnic entrepreneurs and migrant self-employment are very low in comparison to corresponding rates in Italy.

Italy as a host migration country

First noticeable immigrant inflows to Italy started in 1970s, and increased from 1980s onwards. However, they became sizeable only in early 1990s, and boomed since 2001 (Reyneri, 2007). At the beginning, there were numerous women that entered Italy, and fewer families. From 1984 to 1989, some 800,000 people entered Italy, whereas half of them entered or remained undocumented (Zincone, 2006a). The high number of migrants arrived to Italy in the early 1990s transformed it definitely into a host country (Ambrosini, 2011); with one of the biggest number of immigrants in Europe (Allasino *et al.*, 2004). Getting benefit of the enormous external Italian borderlines with countries of emigration and transit, big number of undocumented migrants and migrants with tourist visas arrived to Italy, being also attracted by the high extent of the informal economy (Reyneri, 1998).

In mid 1980s and 1990s, the high demand for migrant labour for domestic services (Ambrosini, 1995), manufacturing, agriculture and construction attracted many migrants who were usually employed informally (Reyneri, 1998). Construction has traditionally attracted many migrant males and this phenomenon can be justified by the fact that most jobs were unskilled (or less-skilled), low-status, physically demanding and, consequently, unattractive to and rejected by native workers (Piore, 1979; Reyneri, 1998). This trend was also due to elderly people willing to exit early from the labour market and youths' delay insertion into it (Reyneri, 2007).

Not having come across such a question before, Italy began to deal with the issue of immigration through temporary administrative measures (Triandafyllidou, 2000). This late response is *inter alia* due to the "invisibility" of first migrant female populations employed in the domestic sector (Andall, 2000). In general, Italian immigration policy has been characterised by opportunism and immigration issues have been managed through short-term approaches (Triandafyllidou, 2000). Zincone (2006b) reports three paradoxes of Italian immigration policies. First, the author refers to a continuity that characterised the stance on immigration by all government coalitions, though their ideological differences. Second, instead of focusing on actual policies that have fallen by the wayside, policy-makers have been engaged in the conceptualisation of policy changes. Third, there have been many mass regularisations of undocumented migrants, notwithstanding the hostility of public opinion to "illegal" migration (Bonifazi and Sabatino, 2003; Zincone and Caponio, 2005). Indeed, Italian legislation addressed the problem of migrants' irregular status mostly by offering extra-ordinary amnesties (six regularization laws in 22 years, in Ambrosini,

2013a) or by defining entry quotas⁴ (Fasani, 2010) in order to regularize those who were living and working informally.

The first modern Italian immigration law in 1986 (943/1986) introduced the first regularisation programme, issuing documents for 118,349 migrants (Zincone and Caponio, 2005). The law dealt mainly with immigrants' access to employment and regulated inflows to protect native workforce from competition from non-EU workers (Zincone, 2006a). Provisions for equal rights and access to welfare for foreign labourers were introduced with Martelli law in 1989 (39/1990). The law of 1989 provided a framework for annual programming of inflows, and introduced regulations on migrants' stay and working conditions, regularising another 234,841 migrants (Zincone and Caponio, 2005).

European standards on equality of treatment between native and foreign citizens were implemented in 1998, under the framework-consolidated law of 1998, known as Turco-Napolitano law (40/1998). This law set as a priority the fight against 'illegal' migration, introducing a quota system for regulating legal entrance (through invitation from an employer or 'sponsored-guaranteed job-seekers'), and new policies for the integration of foreigners. It constituted the first law addressing immigration policy as a permanent phenomenon, and non-under emergency conditions (Zincone, 2006a). The so-called Consolidated Law on Immigration introduced also the job-seekers' residence permit of 6 months⁵ for those who remained unemployed and sought a new job. The Turco-Napolitano law allowed the regularisation of almost 220,000 irregular migrants⁶ (Zincone and Caponio, 2005).

The rigid link between residence and work – that is still in place - was introduced in 2002 (Bossi-Fini law 189/2002), requiring the immigrant to have a long-term job contract to be able to renew his stay permit up to two years (Ambrosini, 2013a). Although this law restricted further the entry of immigrants and introduced tougher controls and potential suppression (Colombo and Sciortino, 2003), it regularised almost 630,000 migrants⁷ (Ambrosini, 2012a). It maintained the quota-based migration schemes based on bilateral agreements between Italy and third countries. The latter

⁴ Entry quotas have been adopted in 1998 when numbers of migrant irregular population were already high. This system has been criticized as ineffective, because of the limited number of permissions provided with respect to the demands of the labour market. To give an example, in 2007 the Italian government set 170 thousand work permit, but the applications were more 700 thousands.

⁵ This time span has been extended up to 12 months with a recent reform of 2012 (Legge (Law) 2012 n. 92 art. 4 comma 30).

⁶ Between 1986 and 2002, there has been a fourth amnesty in 1995 introduced by the law Dini (489/1995). The overall number of migrants granted regular status in the same period is estimated to be almost 790,000 (Ambrosini, 2012a).

⁷ Zincone and Caponio (2005) draw attention to the emergence of new migration flows to Italy that is demonstrated by the nationalities involved in this amnesty, such as migrants from Eastern European countries and Asia.

system has been largely criticised as inefficient and not adequate to respond to demands for labour migration (Lemaître, 2003; Mai, 2011).

With regard to policies constraining the rights of and criminalizing irregular migrants, reference should be made on the “Security Package” amendment on 15 July 2009 (Law 94/2009). This amendment has introduced a series of rules and sanctions against migrants, with special reference to those without regular documents (Di Martino *et al.*, 2013). Having as a principal aim to combat “illegal” migrant flows, the law excluded irregular migrants from a series of services (recording of birth for instance); tightened eligibility criteria for the application of certain types of stay permits; extended the arrest duration for arrested irregular migrants; reduced from fourth to second degree of relationship necessary to prevent expulsion of irregular migrants; reduced the quotas of migrant inflows originated from non-cooperative countries in the fight against “illegal” migration (Di Martino *et al.*, 2013).

However, Italy continued to tackle the question of irregular migration introducing two more amnesties for domestic workers. In 2009, almost 300,000 irregular immigrants applied to acquire a regular status, whereas in 2012 some 130,000 applicants sought to obtain a stay-permit (Delvino and Spencer, 2014). In this sense, Ambrosini (2013b) states that the demand for domestic workers provides a gateway for entry in the Italian labour market.

Nowadays, documented migrant population in Italy is 5,026,153 (Istat, 2017). The most numerous migrant population is Romanians (1,151,395), followed by Albanians (467,687), Moroccans (437,485), Chinese (271,330), Ukrainians (230,728), Moldovans (142,266) and Egyptians (109,871). The majority of immigrants reside in Lombardy (1,149,011 - 22,86% of stock of foreign population), where Romanians (166,983 - 14,5%), Moroccans (101,399 - 8,8%), Albanians (99,571 - 8,6%) and Egyptians (76,644 - 6,7%) are the main national groups that work in the construction industry.

Greece as a host migration country

Greece became an immigration country only in the late 1980s and the early 1990s, quite later in comparison to other European countries. Nikolinakos (1973) reports that at the end of 1972 the number of immigrants in Greece – mostly Africans – amounted to about 20,000 and were largely employed in agriculture, construction and services. The first migrants who arrived in Greece were females from Philippines and young males from northern African (mainly Egypt) and ex-communist countries (mainly Poland). In the 1980-1989 period, Poles arrived to offer services to

Greek construction employers, and from the 1990s until today, Albania has acted as the main labour supplier to the Greek labour market. Contemporary migration inflows come predominantly from Asia and the Middle East (Baldwin-Edwards and Apostolatos 2008).

Apart from the common structural characteristics with other countries of Southern Europe, Greece shares some of the features of contemporary international migration movements (Castles and Miller, 2003, cited in Hatziprokopiou, 2004). Immigrants are originated from numerous countries, and manage to enter the country through different channels such as crossing the borders without authorization, trafficking, over-staying tourist visas, or using contract labour migration. Various categories of migrants have arrived to Greece: from Greek returnees, who have previously moved abroad for economic or political reasons, and highly skilled migrants to trafficked sex workers and refugees. Yet, Hatziprokopiou (2004, p.322) suggests not undermining the importance of the Balkan dimension and some other peculiarities in the Greek case. Namely, immigration patterns to Greece consists in the geographical proximity with the countries of origin (in 2000, almost 65% of stay-permit applicants were Albanians, and 18% came from Bulgaria, Romania, Ukraine, Poland and Georgia, in Lyberaki and Maroukis, 2005), and the relative weight of specific migrant groups, such as the Albanians and people from the ex USSR. It should not be also neglected the significance of self-employment and small scale firms in which migrants usually find job.

In Greece, as was the case in Italy, the overwhelming majority of migrants entered the country without proper documents, when (early 1990s) Greece was still lacking a legislative framework on immigration policy. As a result, the objective of the first immigration law was to restrict and control migration, preventing the entrance of undocumented migrants and imposing the expulsion of those detected without regular documents (law 1975/1991). From that time, three regularisation programmes (1998, 2001, 2005) gave the opportunity to immigrants to acquire the documents necessary for the purpose of employment in the formal economic sector (Cavounidis 2003; 2013).

The first immigration law for labour migrants was implemented in 2001 (2910/2001 Act) and established a complex administrative procedure with regards to the issuing of residence permits (Gemi, 2013). The objective of that law was, on the one hand, to regularise as many migrants as possible by introducing the possibility to purchase 250 daily social security contributions (welfare stamps); on the other hand, to restrict irregular inflows. With the law of 2001, almost 360,000 immigrants acquired regular immigrant status. The next law in 2005 (3386/2005) introduced some provisions in line with EU directions, such as the right to family unification and the long-term stay permit. It also simplified the procedure to renew a stay permit and regularised some 200,000 individuals. Annual quotas were also implemented in the case of Greece to respond to labour

market's needs of seasonal workers (metaklisi/invitation mechanism)⁸. This system worked only in agriculture with limited success, but, in general, was not utilised by Greek employers due to its complexity (Maroukis and Gemi, 2011). An amendment to this law was introduced in February 2007 (Law 3536/2007) with the scope of regularising those who had failed to do it with the previous one. However, both laws have been criticised for the failure to establish stable criteria and an efficient mechanism of regularisation (Gemi, 2013).

In 2010, a new effort has been recorded to resolve the question of immigrants' regularisation in Greece. The law 3838/2010 introduced the right to the Greek citizenship and political participation of migrants. Positive results have been once again limited (Gemi, 2013). Once again, bureaucratic obstacles were proved insurmountable, confirming Greece's restrictive integration policies. These changes were accompanied by xenophobic speeches and public violence against immigrants that considered as steps back for the Greek migration policy (Triandafyllidou and Ambrosini, 2011).

It is also important to refer to the Law 3907/2011 that implemented a new type of stay permit for "exceptional reasons". Undocumented migrants who had been living in Greece for at least twelve years in the past and, in particular, ten years continuously before the application, were entitled to such a permit. These provisions were further developed by the Migration Code voted in 2014, with special reference to those who had developed "special and strong ties with the country". These people were non-EU migrants "*who have lived in Greece for at least three years before the submission of their application and who had a valid entry visa to the country, or can prove to have lived in the country for at least the past seven years, or to have held a stay permit in the past ten years, or to prove that s/he has long lasting ties with the country*" (Triandafyllidou, 2015, p.21). This author argues that that complementary provision has constituted a safety net for those lapsed into irregularity⁹ due to high rates of unemployment during the economic crisis. Stay permits for exceptional reasons are issued for two years and can be converted to regular stay permits.

Another important modification regarding the renewal of stay permits was introduced with the law 4251/2014. This law lowered the number of welfare stamps (proof of working days) required per year from 120 in 2011, to 50. It was the second time from the outset of the economic crisis

⁸ The seasonal metaklisi procedure concerns scheme of invitation for seasonal work in all professions. The employed had to submit to the competent authorities (Municipality or Region) an application in which he defined the number of workers he needed, and the specific period that he would employ them. This system encouraged circular migration and gave the opportunity to irregular migrants to enter the country with a six-month stay permit.

⁹ This phenomenon has been referred as "de-regularisation" process, and denotes migrants' inability to maintain their legal status.

that the requirements to renew the stay permit have been lowered due to the economic recession effects on the labour market (Triandafyllidou, 2015).

Concerning migrants' employment, the high rates of underground economy in Greece represented a factor that attracted many undocumented migrants (Iosifides, 1996). Migrants were employed in small and medium firms which struggled to survive and to be competent resorting to low-paid and flexible workforce. First immigrants found jobs in tourism, agriculture, shipping industry and construction. Similarly to the Italian case, another reason for the massive inflows to Greece was the Greek young population's reluctance to undertake unpleasant and low-status jobs (Iosifides, 1997).

According to the Hellenic Statistic Organisation (2011)¹⁰, the number of immigrants in Greece amounts to 912,000, of whom 731,000 are non-EU citizens. Albanians remain the most numerous foreign national group (480,824 - 52,7% of the total), followed by Bulgarians (75,915 - 8,3%), Romanians (46,523 - 5,1%), Pakistanis 34,177 (3,7%) and Georgians (27,400 - 3,0%). Triandafyllidou (2016) reports that in the second semester of 2016 the stock of foreign non-EU population in Greece was 586,164 and that of EU population 99,422, out of 10,789,602 total population in Greece.

As regards the presence of undocumented Albanian migrants in Italy and Greece, it is necessary to explain a seemingly contradictory phenomenon. On one hand, admission policies have been always restrictive, but, on the other hand, numbers of irregular Albanian migrants are traditionally high. Ambrosini (2015, p.199) states that "*irregular migration is in fact tolerated, when inserted in care work at the service of the growing needs of native families*". The same should be added for irregular migrants employed by natives in agriculture or in construction. In other words, when migrants are perceived useful for the labour market needs, they are socially tolerated, independently from their legal status (Triandafyllidou and Ambrosini, 2011). Then, Albanian workers have developed informal networks that permit them to enter, stay and work in the labour markets, notwithstanding their irregular status. They may enter in a temporary (circular) or more permanent basis to work in the informal economy of both countries. In addition, geographic proximity between Albania and Italy or Greece, that implies low-cost travelling, and people's search for better life generate irregular migration to both countries. Hence, while admission policies remain particularly restrictive, irregular migrants may reside and work in the receiving societies.

¹⁰ The national census of 2011 does not distinguish between documented and undocumented migrants.

Milan

Milan is the most populous metropolitan area in Italy, with over 7 million residents. Milan is located in the North-West of Italy, and is the capital of the region of Lombardy in which reside the majority of migrant population in Italy. The municipality of Milan, with 1,351,000 residents, is considered the dominant urban core in financial terms in Italy (Meijers, Hollander and Hoogerbrugge, 2012). Nowadays, Milan constitutes the driver of the national and regional economy, has the highest level of productivity in Italy (Eurostat, 2016). Financial, commercial, juridical services, and marketing are the most important sectors of the metropolitan city's economy. It has been also considered a global city (Sassen, 1991) in which there is a range of informal and casual market economic activities. These characteristics indicate that Milan represents a "*post-industrial city, both from a socioeconomic and socio-demographic viewpoint*" (Andreotti, 2006, p. 329).

Migratory flows to Milan reflect the trends at national level (Caponio, 2005). In the late 1970s, the first immigrants who arrived to Milan were female workers from Somalia, Eritrea and Philippines employed in the domestic sector. At the same time, it is to note the arrival of political migrants from South America, Africa and Middle East. These migration groups consisted of both males and females. From the early 1980s, another migrant group that arrived to Italy was that of Chinese origin. Many Chinese immigrants settled in Lombardy and have been largely specialised in manufacturing and commercial activities (Ceccagno, 2003).

Since the 1990s, after the collapse of communist regimes, Milan received numerous labour migrants from Eastern European countries such Romania, Ukraine, Moldavia and Bulgaria. The most significant migrant group has been the Romanians who started to arrive in the mid 1990s, and their migration became a booming phenomenon since Romania's adhesion to Schengen agreement in 2002. Romanian immigrants usually arrived in Italy through their informal networks and remain by overstaying their visas. Romanian males have mostly worked in informal economy, mainly in construction, whereas the females have worked in the domestic sector.

Economic crisis that Italy experienced looked less serious in the Centre and North, than in southern regions (Svimez, 2015). In contrast to the situation created in Athens, there has been no fundamental change in migrant groups' composition in Lombardy, and Milan was not affected so much by refugee crisis. Indeed, Milan (and Lombardy) did not shoulder such a burden as other Italian regions did, such as Sicily and Lazio (Italian Ministry of Interior, 2015) where most asylum seekers concentrated.

According to ISTAT (2016), the documented migrant population residing in the province of Milan is 446,462, of whom: Egyptians 52,450; Filipinos 48,651; Romanians 47,564; Chinese 35,746; Peruvians 32,988; Ecuadorians 26,165; Albanians¹¹, 23,666; Sri Lankans 20,646; Moroccans 19,512. It comes therefore that immigrant population is quite heterogeneous and there is a variety of national groups residing in Milan and its satellite cities.

Athens

Athens is the capital of Greece and its population is 664,046. The population in the Athens conurbation is almost 4 million, containing almost 36 per cent of the total population in Greece (11 millions). According to the last Census in 2011, migrant population in Athens is 405.831, of which 333,315 are non-EU nationals; of which almost 200,000 are Albanians (Gemi, 2015).

Egyptians, Filipinos and Poles were the first migrants groups arrive to Athens. Since early 1970s, Egyptian migrants started to arrive to Athens, usually entering with student or tourist visa, and after its expiration, they overstayed in Greece. They were usually employed as street-vendors, in small artisan firms or in construction (Iosifides, 1997). Filipino migration to Athens started between 1970s and 1980s, and concerned mainly females who were employed as domestic workers, whereas male migrants have worked in shipping industry¹². Pole migrants arrived in the 1980s, and males were usually employed in construction, whereas females were domestic workers. It was estimated that in 1992, Pole migrant population was 50,000; Egyptians were about 55,000 and Filipinos 16,000.

During the 1990s, the migration situation started to change in Greece and Athens, and it was characterised by the great numbers of Albanians, largely entered irregularly, and the emergence of new migrant groups. Indeed, in the census of 2001, Bulgarians and Romanians became the biggest migrant groups after the Albanians. The political situation and economic stagnation in Bulgaria and Romania after the collapse of the communist regimes have been the reasons for which immigrants from Eastern European countries arrived in Greece. They usually employed informally in agriculture, services and construction (Maroukis, 2009).

During the 2000s, the features of migration in Athens and Greece have been transformed due to changes at European and global level. First, there have been new migrant inflows from Georgia

¹¹ In Lombardy region, the Albanian population peaked in 2014 (104.458) and entered slight decline (99.571 in 2016) (www.istat.it).

¹² Filipinos had usually had a valid work permit, but some of them were used to falsify it, when the employer did not renew it.

due to the war with Russian Federation in 2008. Georgian migrants have been pushed by poor economic development and upheavals, and arrived to Greece as asylum seekers (Triandafyllidou and Marouf, 2011). Second, immigrants from Pakistan, India and Bangladesh arrived to Athens due to underdevelopment, political upheavals and environmental changes (Gemi, 2015). In 2012, the number of regular citizens in Greece from Pakistan, India and Bangladesh was almost 30,000. Third, significant numbers of refugee asylum seekers arrived from Afghanistan due to continuous conflict from 1980s onwards. However, inadequate migration policy and administrative burdens resulted in high number of irregular migrant population for all these migrant groups (Triandafyllidou, 2017).

In the 2010s, migration situation has shaped by two major crisis. On one hand, Eurozone crisis had important repercussions for migrant groups, since lack of jobs affected migrants in Athens employed in construction and small-medium firms. Approximately 140,000 Albanian citizens return to their home country, whereas Bulgarians and Romanians left Athens due to rampant unemployment and taking benefit from their countries accession to the EU (Gemi, 2015); big number of Poles had already started to left Athens since Poland's access to the EU in 2004. On the other hand, hundreds of asylum seekers in need of international protection arrived to Greece and Athens, and many of them remained entrapped in the Greek territory due to European restrictive policy on asylum seekers. They are mainly originated from Syria, Afghanistan and Iraq, and they usually are found in an impasse, waiting to be provided with asylum and lacking authorisation to work.

In terms of economic activity and population, the Athens conurbation has been the most important region of the country. Until the early 1970s, almost half of Greece's industrial activity was concentrated in the Athens conurbation, whereas by 1990 this proportion decreases to one-third (Leontidou, 1995; Iosifides and King, 1998). Athens's development presents particular characteristics with respect to other West European cities. Leontidou (1990) maintains that popular control of urban land, informalisation of the housing sector, and urban sprawl and unregulated building projects characterize expansion of Athens. Vaiou (2002) states that Athens's growth has been based on small (family) property ownership, and the prevalence of informal working arrangements. Mantouvalou and colleagues (1995) have also argued that informal patterns were developed into structural features of the local market with the tolerance of the state mechanism leaving space to such economic activities that were largely accepted by native people and did not stigmatize or marginalize workforce engaged within (Vaiou, and Hadjimichalis, 1997).

Comparing Athens to other European cities, Arapoglou and Sayas (2009) underline the significant difference on the share of small business owners, independent crafts and farm owners that appears to be triple in the Greek capital with respect to other cities, reflecting also the prevalence of atypical forms of work. However, these occupations are shrinking, giving space to routine service and sales occupations that are growing.

1.1.3. The construction industry

The construction industry cannot be equated to the execution of construction activities; rather, it is a set of firms that “*produce outputs which are similar or reasonably close substitutes for one another*” (Ive and Gruneberg, 2000, p.7). For this research, the specific industry of my interest is the residential construction that includes building construction, maintenance works, repair, renovation, and demolition; where firms undertake on-site assembly. It is important to clarify it, since construction of buildings may include also the construction of bridges, highways, roads, airfields that usually do not concern the same type of companies that are engaged in residential construction.

In residential construction, buildings are usually constructed *in situ* by teams of workers (Walton-Robert and Hiebert, 1997). Construction activities are subject to the vagaries of weather (Bosch and Philips, 2003), but in residential construction weather conditions influence only outdoor activities; less in warmer climates as those of Italy and Greece. Another characteristic in this sector is the prospective entrepreneurs’ willingness to replace other entrepreneurs already active, whereas prospective entrepreneurs have previously undertaken a construction worker’s career (Hiebert, 2002). Because of the cyclical nature of the construction industry, shift of employment statuses is very common, in the sense that builders may repeatedly shift from dependent to independent workers (Rath, 2002). Volatility of construction industry also generates a high labour turnover within the firm, or a turnover of the firms themselves within the sector (Bosch and Philips, 2003).

Bosch and Philips (2003) have argued that the extent of regulation in construction may be determinant of the risks that the firms face and the competition they experience. In this respect, deregulation is a hallmark of this industry in developed capitalist countries. Deregulated markets demand the existence of small firms with limited resources in fixed and human capital. In turn, these small firms are able to find available workforce in order to undertake big jobs through the system of subcontracting. Subcontracting, therefore, enables the division of labour in a fragmented production process (Eccles, 1981; Fellini, Ferro and Fullin, 2007).

With respect to the US and UK construction, the organization of construction work is based on stable hierarchical relationships between contractors and subcontractors. From one side, there are the big companies acting as contractors, and, from the other side, there are the small or medium sized firms that act as subcontractors. These relationships are based on a complex of contracts (Williamson, 1994), and are conditioned by routines and trust, since they are embedded in social networks between various actors (Granovetter, 1985).

In advanced capitalist economies, construction has been also described as a dual market. In this sense, two distinct sectors may be observed. The primary labour market is characterized by steady employment, high unionization, career structures including training, promotion, relative job security, employment rights. In the primary sector remuneration is relatively high, and earnings are based on time, such as weekly or monthly rates of pay. In the secondary labour market, the workers are not employed on a permanent basis, enjoy few rights, do not have long term benefits, and are usually paid on a piece work or per hour (Ive and Gruneberg, 2000, p.42).

The fact that many foreign workers are employed in this labour intensive industry can be initially justified by the fact that most jobs are unskilled (or less-skilled), low-status, physically demanding and, consequently, unattractive to and rejected by native workers (Piore, 1979; Reyneri, 1998). In addition, another reason why migrants can find a job in this sector is the non-movable nature of the production, while employment of migrant workforce is the only way for companies to lower the cost of production (Fellini, Ferro and Fullin, 2007, p.279).

The capitalist construction industry labour market is also characterised by the informal working relations between building workers and their employers. In the UK, for instance, Thiel (2012a, p.114) argues that subcontractors and builders rarely sign formal employment contracts, but rather they rely on “*each other’s morality to loyally honour verbal agreements*” that exceed written ones. Non-contractual relations reign also in the US construction industry (Macaulay, 1963); agreements on wages and working hours are usually the outcome of an informal arrangement in site between employers and workers, at an individual or a group level. In other words, the basis of subcontracting is the dyadic oral contract between a contractor and an artisan (tradesman), so that it is quite impossible to challenge it a court, if agreement is not respected (Moore, 2014). That is why Ive and Gruneberg (2000) have argued that, notwithstanding the annual negotiations between employers’ associations and trade unions in advances economies, collective bargaining does not play such a significant role in construction.

The Italian construction sector

From 1995 to 2007, construction in Italy enjoyed a rapid phase of growth. The years of expansion have been characterised as a “golden period”, comparable only to the period after the Second World War (Negrelli, 2009; Paccagnella, 2009). During this period, production in residential construction raised together with the public works, and the number of the employees in the construction sector raised from 1999 to 2005 by 371,000 (Zucchetti, 2008).

The construction boom in Italy was based on the profound structural and organisational change of the industry from 1980s onwards. Cicconi (1997, p.301) claims that the mutation of construction’s organisation is quite paradoxical, because the organisation of labour in construction is largely characterised by post-Fordist features, though being one of the less affected industries by Taylorism. In this sense, big Italian companies have followed strategies to reduce the cost of production by promoting the fragmentation at the bottom (EFBWW, 2013). Initially, this trend took place in industrial cities like Milan from the end of 1950s onwards, where the industrial development was based on the diffusion and the growth of small companies (Paci, 1973, p.15-23). During the same period, demand has arisen for repair and maintenance of buildings and other engineering structures that stimulated the creation of specialised small firms corresponding to a labour division process. Hence, by outsourcing parts of the production to smaller firms, large Italian corporations achieved to reduce the cost and risks.

At the end of 2008, individual firms represented almost the 71.4% of Italian companies. At the same time, there has been a high concentration at the top, because of the growth of the large construction companies, whereas the number of medium sized firms and cooperatives has decreased (Perrotta, 2011). In their turn, smaller firms subcontracted the work to other smaller ones generating big and complex chains of subcontracting that make it extremely difficult to monitor employees’ working conditions (Idem). Zucchetti (2008) argued that intensive subcontracting has favoured the prevalence and the increase of the underground economy that attracts migrant workers who are usually without bargaining power. Indeed, foreign immigrants replaced Italian internal migrants¹³ in the construction sector.

Regarding the industrial relations, private industrial companies are represented by the National Association of Private Construction (ANCE), which is member of the General Confederation of Italian Industry (Confindustria). There are also other trade associations that together with ANCE

¹³ When speaking, therefore, of the Italian construction industry it would not be omitted that the first population moving to urban centres to be employed in construction concerned internal migratory flows. Paci (1974) reports that the first migratory inflows to Milan came from agricultural areas from the eastern Italian regions and the southern Italy.

represent the companies at the bargaining procedure on terms and conditions of employment with workers' Trade Unions. The National Collective Labour Agreement (Contratto Collettivo Nazionale) constitutes the fundamental agreement within the building industry that regulates wage levels and relationships among social partners (Cremers, 2006).

In Italy, there are three sectorial trade unions of building and woodworkers affiliated to the three central trade union confederations in Italy (Cremers, 2006): FENEAL-UIL (National Federation of Construction and Wood Workers - Italian Union of Workers), FILLEA-CGIL (Italian Federation of Wood and Construction - General Confederation of Italian Workers) and FILCA-CISL (Italian Federation of Construction Workers - Italian Confederation of Workers' Unions). Private companies and workers' representatives have also formed three industry-wide institutions: i) the Joint National Committee for Social funds (CNCE, Commissione nazionale paritetica per le Casse Edili) that regulates aspects with regard to employees' social provisions, ii) the Institution for vocational education and training that direct the building schools (FORMEDIL - Ente per la Formazione e l'addestramento professionale nell'edilizia - Scuole Edile) and, iii) the National Committee for the accident prevention and hygiene in the workplace (CNCPT - Commissione nazionale per la prevenzione infortuni, l'igiene e l'ambiente di lavoro).

It is worth noting that, especially in the region of Lombardy, trade unions have employed many non-Italian workers as officers. During the last years, many construction migrant workers have undertaken the role of "mediator" between the trade unions and other migrants. Their mission is to inform their former colleagues on the latter's rights and obligations. These officers are usually Romanians, Poles, Arabs, Albanians, or Ex-Yugoslavians and are asked to approach the migrant labour force in the lowest levels of the subcontracting chain (EFBWW, 2013).

Finally, in comparison to most of the important economic forces in the EU, the Italian legislation does not provide obligatory formation for the majority of trades in construction, except for some specialisations such as electricians.

In our days, Italy's construction industry accounts for 4,9% of the Italian GNP in 2013 and, in the first three semesters of 2015, it employed median 1,488,000 workers. From 2008 to 2015, the Italian construction industry lost almost 502,000 jobs (ANCE, 2014), drop by 25.3%. In Lombardy, some 60,000 jobs were lost from 2008 to 2013 (ANCE, 2014). Focusing on the Milanese workforce, statistics on dependent workers in construction show that loss of jobs was even more acute (Table 1.5) for both native and migrant workers. In particular, almost 45% of construction workforce remained unemployed, whereas jobs loss for migrants (50 per cent) was higher than that of Italians (40 per cent).

Table 5 – Dependent workers in building trades per nationality registered at the Social Fund of Milan (month of reference July)

Year	Overall	Italian	Foreigners
2007	45.732	24.813	20.919
2008	47.704	24.497	23.207
2009	43.804	22.860	20.944
2010	40.361	21.113	19.248
2011	37.968	19.670	18.298
2012	34.594	18.169	16.425
2013	31.224	16.930	14.294
2014	29.249	16.147	13.102
2015	26.111	14.609	11.502

Source: Elaboration of data available at: <http://ww2.cassaedilemilano.it/>

Moizo and Pignagnoli (2014) report that similar was also the decline in the added value of the industry, almost of 25%, whereas the output of the construction industry decreased by 18% in real terms. As for the residential sector, it has lost -26% of its value. From almost 350,000 in 2005, demand for residential housing building permits has decreased to 200,000 in 2008, and to less than 50,000 in 2015. The main migrant groups employed in the construction sector of Milan are Romanians (24% out of migrant labour force), Albanians (22%), Egyptians (21%) and Moroccans (8,5%) (Cassa Edile of Milan, 2016).

The Greek Construction sector

Residential construction has been one of the pillars of the economic growth in Greece from 1950s onwards (Chatzitsolis and Vlamis, 2014). This increasing contribution to Greece’s national product lies in a booming urbanization process resulting in the concentration of 40% of Greek population in the Greater Athens metropolitan area (Mingione, 1990b).

In general, the construction industry in the whole has been very important to the Greek economy in terms of production and employment. Karousos and Vlamis (2008) reported that from 2001 to 2007 the contribution of construction to the GDP ranged between 6% and 8%, and construction employed more than 7% of labour force in Greece. Maroukis (2013) argued that construction sector’s activity was expanded by means of middle class enrichment during 1980s and 1990s. However, this upward was halted with the outset of the recent economic crisis and decline in middle class living standards. Actually, the first signs had come a little earlier in the general construction sector, in the post-Olympic Games period after 2004 (Ekmetzoglou, 2013). The number of declared employees in construction decreased from around 190,000 employees in 2007

to 125,000 in 2009; to less than 30,000 in 2015 (month of reference July – IKA-ETAM). In other words, Greece saw job losses of 85 per cent within the sector; the same percentages concern both native and Albanian workers.

Table 6 – Formal workers in building trades per nationality in Greece (month of reference July)

Year	Overall	Greeks	Albanians
2007	189.959	104.813	60.043
2008	165.424	89.147	54.165
2009	124.229	68.029	39.602
2010	98.327	54.564	31.408
2011	64.539	37.036	20.219
2012	38.957	23.103	12.048
2013	32.249	18.932	10.438
2014	35.237	20.532	11.708
2015	26.972	16.215	8.761

Source: *Elaboration of data available at: https://www.ika.gr/gr/infopages/stats/stat_report.cfm*

From the end of the Greek civil war until the crisis of 1973, Athens was being transformed to an urban periphery (Labropoulou, 2009). This transformation was accompanied by the industrialization of the Greek capital (and other Greek cities) and the arrival of thousands of people moving away from the countryside due to the stagnation of the agricultural sector. Many of these migrants were formed as builders to work in the booming building construction in Athens that was expanded at a frenzied pace. These builders made up a large section of the manual working class and were gradually and partially replaced by the arrival of the first migrant groups to Athens at the end of the 1980s and early nineties.

Even if Egyptian and Polish have been the first migrant groups working as builders, mass migratory inflows of Albanians undoubtedly have constituted the largest migrant group in the Greek construction sector. Psimmenos (2003) highlights the communal character of Albanian labour within construction and speaks about the ‘albanisation’ of the Greek construction. However, Maroukis (2013) maintains that, due to the fact that the largest proportions of contractors were native people, there has never been a sort of enclave economy (Portes, 1995a) in the Greek construction, but rather an ethnic niche that gave working opportunities to Albanian migrants. Nowadays, the distribution of declared foreigner workers in June 2014 was: Albanians 84,88% - from whom the 40,14% % work in Attica - Romanians 6,46%, Russians 2,11%, Pakistanis 1,38% and Egyptians 1,32% (IKA-ETAM, 2017).

The boom phase of the Greek construction industry lasted from 1994 to 2007 (Chatzisolis and Vlamis, 2014). In this period, construction companies achieved to accumulate big profits, whereas both the number of firms and that of workers were increased constantly (Karousos and Vlamis, 2008). The flexible companies' structure was the key for their economic success, since the vast majority of companies in the Greek construction sector (97%) employ from 0 to 9 employees (IOVE, 2015) reflecting the high segmentation of the Greek labour market.

Reconstructing the working arrangements in Greek residential construction during the period of 1950-1967, it is obvious that organization is quite different from the model of subcontracting in other countries (Labropoulou, 2009, p.180-199). However, even if this author's work refers to five decades ago, it offers useful information about the situation of today, confirming the quasi pro-capitalist organization of the sector. In the Greek residential construction there have always been three main actors related to the execution of a building work: the developer (in Greek *kyrios tou ergou* – κύριος του έργου); the contractor/beneficiary (in Greek *ergholàvos* – εργολάβος); and the workers. The developer is the responsible for the real estate/building work development. In residential construction, the developer is the owner of the house. The developer is the employer for any employee working for each specific project, while the contractor/beneficiary is the responsible for the execution of the works and the one who negotiates the wages with the workforce.

Another relevant element of the residential construction is the fact that (individual) firms are often unstructured and informal, in the sense that - for the majority of professions connected to the building construction - works can be executed by unregistered (individual) firms with the authorities. "Owner" of these unregistered individual firms is the small-scale (sub)contractor/beneficiary (from Greek *mikro-ergolàvos*, μικρο-εργολάβος), who makes the agreements with engineers or house owners on other workers' payments; and makes profit out of each project. The small-scale subcontractor/beneficiary may hire a team of labourers, and he may also work and be declared as all other workers to the IKA Social Fund. Workers are employed on daily basis and are insured through the system of the daily social contributions or welfare stamps (in Greek *énsima*, ένσημα).

The Greek system of Trade Unions is quite different from the Italian one of confederated unions. In Greece, workers employed in the private sector are represented by the Greek General Confederation of Labour (GSEE). At the base of the structure of GSEE are found the primary

unions, which are corporate unions, productive sector or professional ones (Fakiolas, 1985)¹⁴. In construction, local professional units represent builders residing in specific districts. In Athens, the more powerful local professional unit is the Builders' Trade Union of Athens. At a second level, construction workers are represented by the Greek Federation of Builders and Related Professions that embodies all locally-oriented primary Unions and participates in GSEE's procedures. Employers are largely represented by the Association of Technical Companies of Higher Classes and the Association of Greek Contracting Companies and Limited Liability Companies that bargain with the Federation that negotiated builders' wages and work conditions. However, after the first Memorandum between the Greek government and its creditors (IMF, ECB and EC), collective bargaining coverage in the sector is suspended (Georgiadou, 2015). In the Greek case too, building trade certificates and formation are not compulsory.

A relevant element to the action of Builders' Trade Union of Athens and the Greek Federation of Builders and Related Professions is its affiliation to PAME, which is a fraction of GSEE. PAME was founded in 1999 and constitutes a KKE-friendly (Greek Communist Party) union coalition and concerns workers of every productive sector. It entails all "working class-oriented" unions (those allied to KKE), creating a split inside the GSEE. Thus, building sector trade unionists in Athens usually follow KKE's political line, and argue in accordance to Marxist ideas on labour and capital.

1.2. Theories and concepts

In this section, I review literature of theories on migration and some key concepts upon which my research is grounded. It is not a thorough reconstruction of theoretical debates, but rather it constitutes the basis for the analysis of my empirical data. Within the next chapters, I pick up on again these basic theoretical and conceptual considerations, and discuss in more detail when analyzing the empirical material.

¹⁴ Corporate unions may act within a company constellation or concern various companies that belong to the same owner. Professionals unions unify workers with similar skills and jobs (e.g. electricians), whereas employees within a specific sector (e.g. construction) may form productive branch unions, independently from their trade or specialization.

1.2.1. Migration theories

Migration is not a new phenomenon. Castles and colleagues (2014) argue that there have always been movements of individuals or groups of people who sought for better conditions, and new opportunities with respect to those presented in their place of residence. Scholars often agree that there is not a general framework that can fully explain international mobility, and interpret the reasons for which people move. Therefore, it is crucial to adopt a multi-theoretical approach in order to contribute to a better understanding of migration processes, since migratory phenomena are “too diverse and multifaceted to be explained by a single theory” (Arango, 2004, p. 15). However, before presenting the theoretical framework, the initial concern is to define the research subject under study, that is to propose a definition of the “migrant”, as social actor.

According to the United Nations definition (cited in Ambrosini, 2011), a migrant should be considered the individual who has moved to a country other than his/her country of residence, and lives in this third country for more than one year. Ambrosini (2011) states that this definition includes three elements: i) crossing of national borders and movement to another country; ii) this country should be different from the one in which the subject was born, or has regularly lived during the period prior to the geographic mobility; iii) an extended permanence in the new country for at least one year, so that the subject cannot be considered a tourist.

Within the field of migration studies, there has been traditionally a focus on push-pull models, proposed by demographers and geographers (Massey *et al.*, 1998). These models suggested that labour migration is the result of push and pull factors, in the sense that migrants are pushed to move by the limited opportunities and poverty in their country of origin, and, at the same time, they are pulled by the demand for workforce in the secondary economic sector in developed countries. According to this paradigm, individuals act as well-informed rational actors who are able to calculate the costs and benefits of labour mobility (Borjas, 1989), and maximize their income in the destination country.

Push-pull models have been applied to explore both the micro and macro level (King, 2012). At the macro level, migration is the result of the expansion of development, and the unequal capital distribution across the world. As a result, individuals will migrate from countries in which capital is scarce, and labour is abundant, to countries that may offer better work opportunities with higher wages. In the long term, however, wage differentials will be eliminated, and migratory movement will be fewer, if not disappeared. The micro-model of this theory considers individuals as well-informed actors about the options in the migratory destinations, and who are able to evaluate the way in which they may have the greater economic returns (Borjas, 1990). Hence, people will

migrate to countries where they may utilize their human capital in the most productive way (Sjaastad, 1962).

Such explanations of labour migration have been largely criticized as too simplistic. Neoclassical scholars failed to explain why so few people have opted to migrate to another country, and why rates of emigration vary in countries with similar structural economic conditions (Arango, 2004, p.19-20). Furthermore, Massey and colleagues (1993) highlighted the failure of such theories to explain why governments do not achieve to regulate migratory flows; by regulating labour markets, which exclusively induces labour migration, governments could achieve to control individuals' mobility. This theoretical basis seems also problematic for a series of other issues, because: i) it fails to interpret the creation of ethnic communities in destination countries, ii) it does not pay attention to the relative profits of the existence of personal networks in destination countries, iii) it fails to explain why highly skilled migrants are usually employed in low-skilled professions, iv) it does not take into consideration the relevance of historical relations between specific sending and receiving countries, v) it assumes that all countries are accessible to anyone¹⁵, vi) it overlooks the significance of the dependency of developing countries on others in a global economy.

Criticizing functionalist models that tend to explain labour migration in terms of rationality of isolated individuals in their decision-making, the historical-structural approach underlined the relevance of historical determinants for migration globally. Inspired by Marxist historical materialism, structuralist scholars put emphasis on historical dimensions that have been neglected by neoclassic economics. They conceptualize migration phenomena as an outcome of unequal power relations between developed and developing world (Massey *et al.*, 1998), and consider migrants as unfree actors in a global capitalist system shaped by the unbalancing nature of the economic power (Morawska, 2012, p. 55). Migration cannot be a way to restore balance of inequalities between developing and developed countries, but it rather implicates a loss of valuable human resources towards world economic powers that are in need of cheap and exploitable workforce (Sassen, 1988).

Among historical-structural theorists, Piore (1979) shed light on the existence and functioning of a segmented dual labour market, suggesting that pull factors are more determinant than push factors. According to Piore, the labour market is composed by two segments: the primary and the secondary labour market. The primary labour market includes well-paid and secure jobs

¹⁵ Castles and colleagues (2014) have argued that migration of poor individuals cannot be explained by rational-choice models, because they have not access to credit schemes, and as a result they do not possess the capital to arrive in rich countries. Migration to these countries regards largely those individuals with a sufficient financial and human capital in the home countries, that is middle class people.

designated for native workers' demands. On the other hand, the secondary labour market offers low-skilled, bad paid and dangerous jobs that native people avoid. Migrant workers accept such jobs, because such employment opportunities remain better with respect to those in the country of origin. The segmentation of the labour market refers to the secondary sphere, in terms of gender, race and nationality of migrants involved in.

In the same period, historical-structuralist theorists applied neo-Marxist dependency theories to argue that migratory movements are the outcome of global capitalist practices in order to accumulate more capital. Prompted by the dependency theory¹⁶, they argued that migration brings nothing but perpetuation and reproduction of inequalities (Petras, 1981).

Having its roots in dependency theory, *world systems theory* constitutes the third model of historical-structural theory (Wallerstein, 1974). This approach sees migration as the result of the economic globalization prevalence, and not dependent on wage differentials, nor on few employment opportunities in the developing countries. The world here is divided in two areas: the “*core*” (dominant capitalist powers) and the “*periphery*” (poor countries). The interests of the “*core*” have remained active in “*periphery*” through the practices during the era of de-colonization that has been characterized by the prevalence of corporate capitalism in ex-colonies. In particular, rich countries have accessed poor states through multinational companies that take benefit of low wages in periphery (Massey *et al.*, 1993). This pushes the local population to migrate to core countries to work in unskilled sectors.

Historical-structural models have been largely criticized for the passive role they attribute to migrants (Arango, 2004). In this respect, King (2012) argues that these models fail to interpret migration from countries that do not share the characteristics of “*periphery*”. In addition, neo-Marxist models tend to underestimate social actors' agency, in the sense that many migrants have made progress, started up businesses, and achieved to escape from exploitative working conditions. Last but not least, structuralists consider that the states have been subordinate to capital's interests. Here, the state has a limited power in governing migration, and it may, for instance, favour companies' interests by introducing migration laws that constrain the regularization of migrant status, so that the subject is more exploitable.

¹⁶ Dependency theory was born in South America during the 1960s. Analysing developing countries' underdevelopment and the increasing gap with rich countries' development levels, dependency theorists argue that backwardness is the outcome of exploitation practices used by capitalist societies.

Since the 1980s, there have been new theoretical contributions to bridge the gap between neoclassical economists and structuralists; the micro and the macro level. Looking at the meso-level of analysis, several scholars shed light on motivations lying behind migration decision; migrants' representations of their mobility experience; identity issues (Boyd, 1989; Faist, 1997).

One of the most prominent approach that adopts the meso-level analysis is the *New Economics of Labour Migration (NELM)*, that is built upon Giddens' structuration theory (1984) “*as a way of articulating the balance between structure and agency in migration processes*” (Bakewell, 2010, p.1689). NELM theorists recognize the indispensable role of family, households and community networks as decision-making units for migration options (Stark, 1991; Lucas and Stark, 1985; Stark and Bloom 1985; Massey *et al.*, 1998). These units are considered strategic players in decision-making process, not only because they are able to take decisions to maximize incomes, but also because migration serves to avert family's income risks (crop failure for instance); and, it may provide capitals when credit is restricted (Stark, 1984). In this respect, migrants' remittances are of great importance, because they permit to cover family's basic needs, or to invest on working activities of family members in the home country.

However, neither NELM approach has been spared from criticism. Indeed, Arango (2004, p.23) argues that intra-household conflicts may limit household's clarity to make decisions that maximize migration utility. In fact, family members may have different or opposing views on the benefits of migration, and decisions may be the result of patriarchal practices, and as such, they do not guarantee income maximization. This author (2004) also states that this approach puts great emphasis on the supply side of labour migration, and it serves to explain better migration movements from poor and rural areas. In addition, it fails to explain various eventualities such as when people migrate to escape oppressing regimes or unhappy combined marriages, or when all the family members emigrate from the home country.

What however seems most interesting and suitable to interpret the empirical material of my case study is the meso-analysis approach that pays attention to migration networks. *Migration Network Theory* is the product of an earlier theoretical insight, that is “*chain migration*” (Petersen, 1958), and it has been used to analyse the role of migrants' relations on migration trajectories. King (2012, p.21) defines migrants' networks as “*sets of interpersonal ties that connect migrants, non-migrants and former migrants in webs of kinship, friendship and shared origin*”. These connections between various social actors may facilitate migration, allowing the “*acquisition of scarce means such as capital and information, and because they simultaneously impose effective constraints on the unrestricted pursuit of personal gain*” (Portes, 1995b, p.8). In this sense, networks may predict the feasibility and utility of migration episode (Massey *et al.*, 1998).

Although *Migration Networks Theory* offered significant contributions to understand migration movements, it is the New Economic Sociology theorists who put emphasis on the importance of a series of non-economic factors, such as social norms, cultural elements and institutions' functioning that influence decisions on migration, settlement and insertion in the labour market of destination country. This is of crucial important for my dissertation, since I focus mainly on migrants' action within the country of destination.

1.2.2. New Economic Sociology and Sociology of Immigration

Recalling Polanyi's concept of embeddedness (1957), Granovetter (1985) proposes to consider economic action always embedded (grounded) in the social sphere and oriented by cultural components; otherwise, it is not feasible to understand the mechanisms that lay behind this action. More precisely, no economic phenomenon can be assessed without the shared understandings (culture), institutional structures, symbols and networks of inter-actor relationships that concretize it and give it form (Guillèn *et al.*, 2002, p. 6). In turn, social interaction creates continually cognitive and normative cultural components that help actors make sense of the situation, develop strategies for action and adjust their expectations and behaviours (Ibid, p. 8).

Granovetter (1990) proposed also a distinction between two different types of embeddedness: *relational embeddedness* and *structural embeddedness*. The first type refers to personal relations between economic actors. It mainly consists in social actors' expectations and demand for reciprocity in economic transactions from other actors. The second type refers to broader set of relations which social actors belong to (Portes, 1995b, p.6). *Structural embeddedness* includes the normative expectations for reciprocity and trust in transactions within larger social aggregates.

At this point, it is useful to recall that, although networks' importance as structures that shape economic actors' actions, individuals are able to mobilize resources depending on their position within networks, as well as on network's characteristics (Portes, 1995b, p.12). In other words, I refer to individuals' social capital that is their capacity to mobilize free cost resources on demand. An individual A, for instance, may give an information for a job opportunity to another individual B of his network, with the expectation that the individual B will repay the individual A in a reciprocal way, in an undefined time horizon.

For the analysis of migrants' economic practices, it is also crucial to take into consideration another form of capital, that is the *cultural capital* (Bourdieu, 1986). The cultural capital includes the long-lasting dispositions of the mind and the body, that is, for instance, language skills, the knowledge about customs and lifestyles and professional qualifications. By using the concept of

cultural capital, it is possible to explain why some individuals develop specific skills and are able to execute different tasks. An interesting aspect concerns the convertibility of cultural capital¹⁷ into other forms of capital, such as economic or social, that in turn may be converted into economic. For instance, migrants with good language skills may have weak ties with the host society, and be offered more and better job opportunities, that results in higher income.

The notion of the strength of weak ties (Granovetter, 1973; 1983) constitutes another influential contribution from the New Economic Sociology that allows understandings on migrants' social mobility in the country of destination. According to Granovetter, different types of ties may condition economic actors' capacity to use resources; it is important, therefore, to analyse the processes within networks. Granovetter (1973, p.1361) defines the tie strength as a "*combination of the amount of time, the emotional intensity, the intimacy (mutual confiding), and the reciprocal services which characterize the tie*". "*Weak ties provide people with access to information and resources beyond those available in their own social circle*" (Granovetter, 1983, p.209). On the other hand, strong ties may be used by poor and insecure people as a source of agency when facing economic pressure, although these ties are less likely to provide solutions. Other scholars have argued that notwithstanding the constraining nature of ethnic social ties, they can provide more immediate and efficient answers to migrants' needs with respect to social network in general (Ambrosini, 2011).

Although weak ties may provide alternative options to economic actors, Ryan (2011) demonstrates the need to differentiate horizontal from vertical weak ties, in the sense that weak ties are more valuable when they link people from different social locations. Based on Bourdieu's (1986) assumption that individuals who have more resources and knowledge may provide assistance in a more efficient way, Ryan and colleagues (2008; 2011) illustrate how new arrived migrants who established (vertical) ties with native people managed to move up the social ladder, whereas those who maintained (horizontal) weak ties only with individuals from the same social location remained stable in terms of progress.

Last but not least, it is important to introduce the concepts of bonding and bridging social capital in order to explore migrants' actions. Putnam (2000) defines as bonding ties those homogenous ties among group member (co-ethnics or family members), whereas bridging ties are those heterogeneous ties among individuals not belonging to the same group. In general, bridging social

¹⁷ With respect to Southern European countries and analysing labour migration in the domestic sector, Ambrosini (2013b) argues that human has been usually conditioned by social capital. However, there have been studies that highlight the importance of cultural capital also for low-skilled professions (see Hagan, Lowe, Quingla, 2011).

capital is considered of an indispensable source of agency for immigrants, and leads to better employment opportunities and occupation status (Moroşanu, 2016).

Criticism to social network theory has been proposed by those who find the network as a structure that will decline in strength and extent at some point in the future (King, 2012, p.22). Other critics refer to the economic exchanges in capitalist markets that are not embedded in social structures, and actors may be free of moral ties in market activities (Swedberg, 2003). In a different way, Callon (1998) argues that individuals may not be interested in social norms and are able to make transactions freely, since economic markets can be characterized as “*socio-technical devices*” that permit socially disembedded transactions (cited in Thiel, 2010).

All in all, theoretical insights from Sociology of Immigration are used throughout the thesis to offer better understandings on Albanian builders’ economic actions within and outside the construction sector.

1.2.3 Transnational societies

Castels and Miller (2009) sustained that the micro, macro or meso levels of analysis are not always well equipped to interpret transnational movements that question state authorities. Global dynamics and technological advancement enable transnational mobilities that are not geographically clustered within the borders of one state. To study such phenomena it has been introduced the notion of transnationalism (Glick Schiller, Basch and Blanc-Szanton, 1992).

Transnationalism refers to a social formation that presupposes the existence of cross-border transactions and transnational ties between people and institutions in at least two different nation-states (Faist, 2010a). It deals with activities of migrants within transnational spaces that may challenge national and local institutions. In this sense, Faist (2010b) describes these social formations as networks that may maintain, bridge and, simultaneously, transform social, emotional, cultural, economical and political relationships between sending and receiving countries. In other words, transnational communities may be regarded as groups based in two or more countries, which engage in recurrent, enduring and significant cross-border economic, political, social or cultural activities (Portes, 1997; Portes, Guarnizo and Landolt, 1999).

With regard to the European context, this notion has been linked with the phenomenon of circular migration (provisional or seasonal work periods abroad) that is supposed to bring gains to three parts: the countries of origin, the countries of destination and the migrants themselves (Ambrosini, 2013c). As soon as migrants fulfil some of their initial objectives, they may support the

development of their homelands, being simultaneously present in their country of origin and of destination. This pattern may be profitable for both the receiving society, which need not permanently settled foreign manpower, and the country of origin, which may take advantage of immigrants' remittances and the political influence they have (Guarnizo, 2003).

Transnational migration theorists have received some criticism. Morawska (2003) questions the extent to which transnational practices are carried out by immigrants, and whether it can be relevant to second generations. In fact, other scholars argued that transnational practices refer to migrants elites, and it is therefore a very limited phenomenon (Guarnizo, Portes and Haller, 2003). There have been also some skepticism about the possibility of measuring¹⁸ and defining transnational ties as such (Morawska, 2003).

For the above-mentioned reasons, attention shifts from transnational migrants to transnational practices. The focus here is on the micro- agency-centered level related to individual or collective actions. In fact, these practices have been seen as occupations and transactions that are carried out in a continuous and regular way, and require the maintenance of social contacts across national borders (transnational social fields) (Portes, Guarnizo and Landolt, 1999).

In this respect, Itzigsohn and Giorguli-Saucedo (2005) proposed a typology that divides transnational practices in '*linear transnationalism*', '*resource-dependent transnationalism*' and '*reactive transnationalism*'. The first type of transnational practices are undertaken by migrants who maintain relationships with the country of origin and their families. '*Linear transnationalist*' practices include transfer of remittances and continuous interaction with institutions in the context of origin to ensure their position. '*Resource-dependent transnationalism*' refers to an involvement of a stage, after the very first years since migration in which migrants are in a precarious economic position. Once they have achieved an economic stability, they may engage in investment project or philanthropic activities in their home country. The third type of practices is called '*reactive transnationalism*' and it is considered the result of a problematic incorporation and profound disappointment with economic (few opportunities), personal (prestige) and social (status and discrimination) situation in the country of destination. In this case, migrant may be involved in transnational mobility as a way to counterbalance the lack of recognition of social status.

With respect to the Italian case (and Southern European countries), Ambrosini (2013c) proposed a distinction between two different types of transnationalism: the '*basic transnationalism*' and

¹⁸ However, Snel and colleagues (2006) have quantified the extent to which migrants are engaged in transnational activities, and indicated that transnational involvement does not impede integration in host societies.

the '*advanced transnationalism*'. The '*basic transnationalism*' refers to the remittances sent by migrants to their home countries. It is a typical practice of newly arrived migrants, and it usually refers to separated families (usually migrant mothers). At the first stage of this type of transnational practices, contact among transnational family members is not physical, in the sense that they communicate by telephone. In addition, migrant entrepreneurs still lack the resources to invest directly in their home country, and they may start up business in the receiving country. '*Advanced transnationalism*' refers to well-integrated migrants with higher levels of cultural and financial capital. At this stage, migrants' activities may involve in starting up business in their homeland. At a later stage, they may be engaged in philanthropic activities, and their practices may entails in political action. Transnational practices may weaken as migrants' integration increase, whereas their presence in their homeland may be advanced when conditions improve. These considerations on migrants' transnational movements will be used in Chapter 5 to explore the relevance of transnational mobility to cope with unemployment during the economic crisis.

1.2.4 Informal economy

Defining informal economy depends largely on the topic and the nature of research. Williams (2004) listed 45 different nouns and 10 adjectives betokening informal employment, such as 'cash-in-hand', 'undeclared', 'shadow', 'informal', 'black' and 'underground' economy/sector/work. This variety of terminology undoubtedly denotes a confusion when defining the phenomenon of informality. However, it seems there has been a substantial convergence among scholars on the definition of the informal sector. Informal economy encompasses "*those actions of economic agents that fail to adhere to the established institutional rules or are denied their protection*" (Feige, 1990, p.990). Alternatively, it includes "*all income-earning activities that are not regulated by the state in social environments where similar activities are regulated*" (Castells and Portes, 1989, p.12).

Although this convergence, I opt to use a definition that has been used to study informal employment by various scholars, according to whom informal work involves "*transactions that are not declared to the authorities for tax, social security and/or labour law purposes when they should be declared but are licit in every other sense*" (Williams and Windebank, 1998; 1999; OECD, 2002) In doing so, I do not tend to analyse informal practices present in construction sites such as stealing of materials (Thiel, 2012a), but rather I consider them 'criminal' economy (Williams, Nadin and Windebank, 2011).

Reviewing now the literature on the nature of undeclared work in Europe and beyond, there have been significant advances in comprehending its character and the reasons for which social actors

are engaged in it. The concept of informal economy was introduced by Keith Hart (1970) who studied the transactions of petty urban entrepreneurs in Ghana. Initially, informality concerned poor self-employed workers whom economic activities were considered distinct from wage employment. Informal employment was considered almost synonym for underemployment involving low levels of productivity and accumulation capacity (Tokman, 1982). Hence, informal employment was interpreted as a residue from an earlier mode of production and consumption that demonstrated 'backwardness' and 'underdevelopment' (Lewis, 1959; Geertz, 1963; Derrida, 1967). In that period, therefore, it had been assumed that there was a clear split between formal and informal employment.

In the following decades, dualistic theories on informality were called into question by many scholars. Lipton (1984) set out the problem of a '*misplaced dualism*' and '*misplaced isolation*' regarding the informal sector. He considered that it was a fallacy to consider formal and informal as two separate realms. During the 1990s, dualistic theories on informality in the labour markets were also questioned by scholars who read informal employment as the outcome of the vast deregulation in the labour market in a globalisation era (Castells and Portes, 1989; Portes, 1994; Sassen, 1997; Gallin, 2001; Hudson, 2005). Informal work was not only about poor self-employed workers, but it concerned employees as well. According to this approach, on the one hand, employers in developing countries opt to take on or to devolve various stages of production to undeclared workers, seeking to lower the cost of production. In the Western world, on the other hand, workers are engaged in informal employment because of the end of full-employment; concomitant of the deep crisis of the welfare state during the 1970s and the 1980s (Hudson, 2005). Informal employment is seen, therefore, as a survival strategy employed mostly by marginalized populations (Castells and Portes, 1989; Sassen, 1997; Slavnic, 2010).

Contrary to both residue and by-product approaches that see informal economy as a substitute for formal sphere in Western nations, informal employment might be the preliminary step towards the insertion into the formal economy. This may be the case of informal self-employed workers for instance who decide to register with official authorities (Cornuel and Duriez, 1985; Williams, 2004; Williams, 2006). Hence, instead of being the opposite of "decent work" (ILO, 2002), undeclared work may lead to formalisation of economic activities.

To explain participation in informal economy other scholars have adopted the '*exit option*' or '*reinforcement*' perspective. In this case, social actors may decide to be voluntarily engaged into informal working patterns in order to evade the restrictions imposed by burdensome states, so as to save money, time and effort of formal bureaucratic procedures (De Soto, 1989; 2001). This perspective has been supplemented by other critical post-structural theorists who argue that

informal employment is the result of social actors' rational choice to offer services to kin, neighbours, friends and acquaintances, without aiming to have purely financial gain. In this case, agents' actions are driven by the expectation that this service will be repaid by the recipients of the services with in-kind favours and gifts (Williams, 2004; Round and Williams, 2008).

Finally, recent studies have sought to interpret the participation in informal employment inspired from institutional theory. Here, formal institutions are considered the codified laws and regulations that set the framework of legal activities, whereas shared unwritten rules, values and beliefs of people compose the informal institutions (Helmke and Levitsky, 2004). In this sense, it is argued that the lower is the alignment of formal and informal institutions, the greater is the likelihood that social actors' are engaged in informal working arrangements (Williams and Horodnic, 2015; Williams, Horodnic and Windebank, 2015). It is therefore argued that populations that have confidence in formal institutions and high tax moral, and that comply with written laws, are less motivated to be engaged in informal employment. In Chapter 4, but also in other parts of the dissertation, I delve into all the above-mentioned theories to explore Albanians' engagement in informal employment. In doing so, I insert these theoretical insights into the principal theoretical framework of New Economic Sociology approach, that linked the sociology of immigration and informal economy.

1.2.5 Coping strategies, tactics and survival practices

The principal goal of this dissertation is to explore how Albanian migrant builders get by in Italy and Greece during the recession, that is to cast light on their responses to lack of employment in their sector of expertise. The root of this question is found on the necessity to discover the ways in which individuals cope in marginal situations. In other words, the interest has been on the study of how people get by in hard times, and which their responses to marginal situations are (Wallace, 2003). This argument has been particularly interesting due to the effects of post-Fordist area, and the insertion of women in the labour market (Datta *et al.*, 2007).

Examining this question, scholars have usually used the concept of "coping strategies". This concept has been used in the global North in order to explore individuals and households' agency when facing unemployment and industrial restructuring effects (Datta *et al.*, p.405). Datta and colleagues (2007, p.406) state that the term strategy has served to discuss the mobilization of the household to maximize income resources, to secure domestic work and children/elderly care, the use of social and family networks, eliciting information and self-provisioning. On the other hand, research in the Global south has focused on informal economies, and explored questions

connected to individuals' survival strategies during recession periods (Sparr, 1994). Here, social actors seek to minimize even the consumption of alimentation goods, and maximize household's income by working long hours, or thanks to the occupation of other family members that were before inactive (Datta *et al.*, 2007). The relevance of networks remains high with regard to circulation of information and caring of community members (mainly by women, in: Chant, 1996).

However, Datta and colleagues (2007) have highlighted a misuse of the term "strategy", since the efficiency of resources mobilization may not be considered the same between different groups. For instance, Ward and colleagues (2007) illustrated how working-class couples were less effective in dividing domestic labour than affluent ones. In addition, Datta and colleagues (2007) argue that these approaches tend to underestimate the role of a series of factors having a bear on practices developed by powerless individuals, such as how various forms of capitals may result in capacity to resist against poverty. For this reason, these authors suggest to adopt a focus on livelihoods, that is to turn scholars' attention to a variety of individual and structural factors (see for instance Moser, 1998). In other words, when examining social actors' everyday micro-scale responses, instead of using notions such as '*survival strategies*', '*coping tactics*', '*forms of resistance*', '*resistant practices*', '*reworking strategies*', '*resilience practices*' in a casual way, this choice of terms should be justified in order to better understand power relations between social actors. For this reason, inspired from Datta and colleagues (2007) and Rogers and colleagues (2008) works, I will use the De Certeau's (1984) concepts of '*strategy*' and '*tactic*' to examine labour migrants' coping practices during the recession period in Milan and Athens.

For De Certeau (1984, p.xix), '*strategy*' entails "*the calculus of force-relationships which becomes possible when a subject of will and power (a proprietor, an enterprise, a city, a scientific institution) can be isolated from an 'environment'. A strategy assumes a place that can be circumscribed as proper (propre) and thus serve as the basis for generating relations with an exterior distinct from it (competitors, adversaries, "clienteles," "targets," or "objects" of research)*". In this respect, migrants' practices may be analysed as strategies, when powerful agents act with determination after having worked out the correlation of forces. Such agents are rational actors who are able to objectify the rest of the social environment by virtue of their access to a spatial or institutional location that allows them to do so. Migrants may seek to distinct their "own" place to establish the boundaries, to predict "adversaries" strategies, and make the rules of their action in order to reach their goal.

On the other hand, De Certeau calls '*tactic*' "*a calculus which cannot count on a "proper" (a spatial or institutional localization), nor thus on a borderline distinguishing the other as a visible*

totality. The place of a tactic belongs to the other. A tactic insinuates itself into the other's place, fragmentarily, without taking it over in its entirety, without being able to keep it at a distance. It has at its disposal no base where it can capitalize on its advantages, prepare its expansions, and secure independence with respect to circumstances [...] (it) depends on time-it is always on the watch for opportunities that must be seized "on the wing." For De Certeau, tactic is “*the art of the weak*”. In this respect, actions of migrant workers occur into a place that does not belong to the very social actor; tactics assume a place with blurry borders, indistinct to the others. Contrary to the adoption of strategies that implicates the win of the space over the time, agents’ tactics depend on the time, that is migrants have to be “*on the right point in time*” (Ibid, p.82); to benefit from events in a timely manner, so they have the possibility to contest the social order. Hence, the agent constantly seeks to combine various events within temporary time “*in order to turn them into ‘opportunities’*”. To do so, migrants have to possess or activate skills such as “*cunning, manoeuvres, polymorphic simulations, joyful discoveries*” and intelligences (Ibid, p. xix), and have to negotiate the spaces shaped by the strategies of powerful agents.

De Certeau’s strategies and tactics dyad has been used to analyse both migrants’ resilience practices (Datta *et al.*, 2007) and individuals’ engagement in informal economic activities (Round *et al.*, 2008). Datta and colleagues (2007) brought to the fore practices that low-paid migrant workers employed to survive in the London labour market. In particular, migrants have mainly undertaken income generating activities (for instance working overtime, doing more than one job), deployed household labour, created social groups and participated in organizations in order to get by and respond to social exclusion. On the other hand, Round and colleagues (2008) studied Ukrainians’ everyday involvement in their home country informal economy and showed the interconnection between spaces of power and tactics. Discussing a range of informal activities (informal selling, cash-in-hand building works), the authors demonstrated how the analysis of individuals’ informal activities under De Certeau’s terminology may contribute to the comprehension of such complex phenomena that are embedded on a mixture of power relations dominating certain spaces.

Another important contribution to social actors’ everyday acts of resistance is that of Katz (2004). Examining everyday practices of resistance of a Sudanese rural population, this author has elaborated a categorisation of individual and collective responses as ‘*resilience*’ (autonomous initiatives through which actors may recuperate power and alter structures), ‘*reworking*’ (attempts to undermine structural constraints), and ‘*resistance*’ (actions to disrupt exploitative condition, or to create opposition consciousness) practices. Katz likened the latter category of practices to De Certeau’s tactics, in the sense that such responses engage in opposition to undermine the success of (powerful) others’ plans.

All above-mentioned contributions that have used De Certeau's (1984) notions of "strategy" and "tactic" denote a certain (even minimal) agency of social actors, that is their capacity to mobilise resources or exert some degree of control over social relations that "*implies the ability to transform these social relations to some degree*" (Sewell, 1992, p.20). However, what misses from this distinction is a third type of practices, those which take place in an absolutely passive way. I define these practices as *survival* when they concern social actors having no power who aim to cover basic needs. Such actions do not entail any initiative not aimed at achieving any sort of structural change. *Survival* practices contribute to the social reproduction, and may be somehow unwitting or unintended. Hence, when powerless social actors are compelled to accept exploitative conditions imposed by others that are sufficient to guarantee only continuity of existence (referring to work or household), their actions are characterised as survival.

Having added the category of *survival* practices concerning social actors with no power, I adopt the distinction between tactics and strategies (De Certeau, 1984) that refers to power relations between social actors. Hence, when coping practices are the result of a rational action and implicate a certain level of power by the social actors, I shall use the term *strategy*. Differently, when practices to cope with everyday life demands follow powerful actors' planning, and constitute temporal responses to structural constraints, I shall use the notion of *tactics* to illustrate how Albanian workers take action to cope with hardships and exclusion from official systems in the receiving countries¹⁹. Thus, I categorize these responses as "survival", "tactical" and "strategic" in an effort to offer more nuanced understandings of migrants' practices to economic change, and to offer a contribution to the wider literature on the agency of the migrant and his/her household.

I consider useful to turn now to the discussion on migrants and their household's "*capacity to reflect on their position [...] and take action to achieve their desires*" (Bakewell, 2010, p.1694); their human agency. As introduced before, migration scholars have usually recognised that migrants may have the ability to make independent choices when they migrate or settle in the destination country (Bakewell, 2010; de Haas, 2014). This discussion is very relevant for the study of migration, because the agency debate contributes to the "*development of social scientific theory on migration and in shaping the policy responses to people's movement*" (Bakewell, 2010, p.1690).

¹⁹ When citing other research I use the term strategy or tactic as it has been used by the scholar himself, and not on the basis of De Certeau terminology.

Migration scholars have defined ‘*human agency*’ in different ways according to the extent to which their research subjects are considered able to interact with and alter social structures. From an individualist point of view, social actors may be considered able to exercise their power and devise strategies “*even under the most extreme forms of coercion*” (Long, 2001, p.16). Other scholars inspired by Giddens’s theory of structuration have reconciled agency and structure. They assume that individuals’ action is shaped by and –at the same time- shapes the society (Morawska, 2009, p.2). In a different way, de Haas (2014, p.21) considers migrants’ agency “*the limited but real ability of human beings (or social groups) to make independent choices and to impose these on the world and, hence, to alter the structures that shape people’s opportunities or freedoms*”.

As regards social structures, those are understood as “*any recurring pattern of social behaviour*” (Scott and Marshall, 2009); “*patterns of relations, beliefs and behaviours*” (de Haas, 2014, p.21). Such patterns of behaviour and interrelationships in any social system influence people’s actions, at the point that they may act unconsciously or irrationally. Hence, agents’ choices and opportunities may be limited and hampered by a range of structural constraints, such as social class, religion, gender, ethnicity, networks, labour market situation. Contradictions, tensions and interrelations among all these factors and institutions may “*create ‘gaps’ or ‘loopholes’ in between different social arrangements*” (Morawska, 2009, p.3), from which agents may take benefit to achieve their goals.

Linking now migrants’ agency with De Certeau’s notions of *strategy* and *tactic* it could be said that the notion of agency is closely linked to the notion of power (de Haas, 2014, p.21), and as such to the notion of *strategy*. *Strategic* actions are undertaken by powerful agents who can “*exercise their own causal powers*” (Parker, 2000, p.73). In other words, the Weberian definition on the notion of power connected to “*the ‘causal’ ability of people to realise their will and to control the behaviour of others, which is in turn based on people’s ability to control resources*” - as de Haas (2014, p.21) argues – may be identified as *strategy*. It misses now to explore what the relation between agency (strategy) and tactic is. Based on different cases of Albanian migrants who act *tactically*, I try to propose a connection between these two notions in the conclusions of this dissertation.

Chapter 2

Research methodology

This chapter outlines the methodology used in this dissertation. It explains the reasons for which qualitative approach has been selected, and how it studies comparatively the two migrant populations: Albanian construction workers in Milan and Athens. It then presents the methodological tools used to recruit informants, the data collection method, the sample and the challenges faced during the fieldwork research. Finally, it discusses how the data are analysed, my role as researcher, the limitations of this type of research, and some ethic issues regarding the research participants.

2.1 Methodological approach

Methodology is deemed the epistemological basis for investigating social questions and producing knowledge about social actions (Castles, 2007). Reflecting on the methodology is of a great importance, since answering to specific research questions demands specific methods. Indeed, it is crucial to recognise that the nature of the inquiry leads to distinctive methodological approaches of social science. Once decided between qualitative and quantitative research (or a mixed approach), the epistemological approach defines the specific tools within each methodological line.

For this project, I determined the use of qualitative methods and techniques in order to answer the research questions, as already presented before in the Introduction. The choice to apply a qualitative approach was conditioned by the nature of the research aims and the kind of data to be collected. My intention was to explore the structural and the individual perspectives and to analyse how migrant builders and their families responded to structural constraints in times of economic recession. Next, aiming at shedding light on migrant workers' participation in the informal economy, the reasons for which they are involved in informal working arrangements and their capacity to negotiate, it led me to select a qualitative approach (Coletto, 2010).

By the same token, the adoption of quantitative methodological approach would be problematic, due to the distinctive characteristics of the construction industry that lean on migrant labour. Informality, geographical mobility and return in the country of origin (Mai, 2011; Maroukis and Gemi, 2011), and the irregular status of a significant number of workers make it extremely difficult to conduct a quantitative survey about immigrant groups. With this in mind, migrant

construction workers might be considered a “hard-to-reach” population, since many of them work in the informal economy or have an irregular immigration status.

In such a case study, it seems necessary that the researcher utilise various qualitative methods to study tricky phenomena (such as informal economy for instance) and to understand underlying social problems. Indeed, there have been many qualitative studies utilizing ethnography and various qualitative tools in order to study migrant populations working in the construction industry (see for instance in France: Jounin, 2008; in the UK: Thiel, 2007; 2012a; in Italy: Perrotta, 2011; Morrison, Sacchetto and Cretu, 2013).

As regards the study of social phenomena connected with informal economy, it is suggested by many scholars that the combination of ethnographic research and qualitative techniques is indispensable to analyse the interactions among social actors in “dense” social (or urban) settings (Sassen, 1994; Coletto, 2010). In fact, construction sites constitute social settings in which there is a great occurrence of informal economy and extensive use of migrant workers (Ive and Gruneberg, 2000). In my case, despite the fact that it has not been possible to do an ethnography neither in the Italian nor in the Greek context, I managed to collect a great bulk of information about the nature of informality and the reasons for which social actors are involved in informal activities.

It is also of great significance the existence of a constant dialogue among disciplines when focusing on heterogeneous and uncertain social settings, as that of the construction industry. Even more specifically in migration studies, many scholars have highlighted the importance of an interdisciplinary approach (see for instance Favell 2008; King, 2002; 2012). In fact, sociologists, anthropologists, economists, historians and political scientists have contributed in general textbooks on migration (see for instance Geddes and Boswell, 2010) underlying the usefulness of an interdisciplinary approach in order to shed light on all dimensions of social existence that migration embraces (Castles, 2010).

In this regard, this research ‘borrows’ from other studies and, in particular, from history, political sciences, law studies, from statistics, and from geography. Namely, history matters for understanding how the evolution of Greek and Italian construction sector favours or constrains migrants’ agency and their involvement in informal economy. Political science contributes to explore how the State responds to labour market, whereas law studies help to capture significant nuances of – at times – intricate laws that regulate migrant labour. Then, the statistical description of the population and the economic situation during the period under investigation gives significant insights. Finally, geography contributes to the perception of ‘transnational spaces’ that are more and more relevant to migration studies. However, the objective of such an approach

should be a continuous “*talk across disciplines*” (Brettell and Hollifield, 2007), rather than “*putting them all together in a bland mixture*” (Castles, 2007, p. 353).

2.2 Comparative case-study approach

According to Creswell (2009), a case study is a strategy of inquiry when the researcher aims to study thoroughly a process, an activity, of one or more individuals; to produce in-depth knowledge of the phenomenon under inquiry. Multiplicity of perspectives rooted in a (or in a number of) specific context(s) is a primary feature of case studies (Ritchie and Lewis, 2003). Case studies usually demand that the researcher use different methods of data collection. Complex designs might involve different social actors in the same social setting. In this case, different perspectives of the concerned actors can generate deep knowledge and detailed understandings of the question. The understating should be holistic, comprehensive and contextualized (Ibid, p. 52). Hereto, Stake (2005) argues that a case study can be investigated analytically or holistically, organically or culturally, entirely by repeated measure or hermeneutically, but, at any rate, the researcher has to concentrate on the case.

Each case study is bounded by time and activity, and data collection is carried out over a continuous period. The specific context in which the studied phenomenon takes place is of major relevance, since it influences social actors’ actions (Yin, 2014). Even if the case is singular, Stake (2005) points out that it is embedded in a number of contexts or backgrounds, and it entails subsections, different groups, and various occasions (work days, holidays, unemployment periods). Further, it is also true that historical, cultural, physical, social, economic, political, ethical, and aesthetic contexts are of great interest of each case.

With regard to caseworks’ purposes, Yin (2014) distinguishes three different types of case study: the explanatory, the descriptive and the exploratory. My thesis combines these three categories seeking to explain how structure constrains or enables migrants’ agency; to describe and analyse the nature of informal economy and the job recruitment process; to explore migrants’ strategies and future plans. Therefore, the distinction among the three different types of caseworks is not always feasible in practice.

At the same time, in recent years more and more qualitative researchers opt for comparing case studies. According to Ritchie and Lewis (2003), comparison enables the building of theory and improves the solidity of research results. For my case, I chose to focus on two urban contexts: Milan and Athens. Although, I do not compare these two research settings neither as ‘*global cities*’ in Sassen’s terms (1991), nor I consider that they always refer to national institutional settings. In contrast, I adopt a comparative approach that studies locality and the dynamic

relationship between migrants and the places of settlement (Glick Schiller, Çağlar and Guldbrandsen, 2006; Glick Schiller and Çağlar, 2009). I have therefore paid attention not to obscure the distinctive characteristics of each city, avoiding their total homogenization under the umbrella of the national state (Cohen, 2004).

Athens and Milan are studied beyond the typical cross-national comparative approach that concentrates on global cities as spaces of economic power where density of population is quite high. According to Glick Schiller and Çağlar (2009, p.185), the concept of city scale is of great importance “*to highlight the dynamic and transductive relationships that cities achieve through their relative positioning within intersections of hierarchical fields of power*”. Using the concept of city scale, Milan and Athens are two cities placed in a specific national context whose positioning “*reflect and shape the relationship of urban places to regions, states, supra-regions and the globe*”. Hence, it is important to say that the comparison does not focus on nor analyses the specific contexts in terms of geographical characteristics; rather, the objective is to study research subjects who have worked in the main in and around these metropolitan areas.

In particular, alluding to comparison in migration studies, Green (1994) distinguishes three types of (inter) national comparisons when studying migration issues: the ‘*linear*’, the ‘*convergent*’, and the ‘*divergent*’. First, the ‘*linear model*’ proposes that the researcher follow the immigrant from one point to another (for instance from Tirana to Milano) so that s/he compare past to present, the experiences in migrant’s country of origin with that in the country of arrival. Second, when dealing with different national or ethnic groups, the ‘*convergent model*’ suggests comparing social mobility in the very same place. By taking a city as the constant, the researcher may interpret for instance how cultural origins influence the level of migrants’ adaptation to the city. Third, to study comparatively for instance questions of tradition and culture, continuity and change, the ‘*divergent*’ studies put emphasis on the point of arrival, rather than on the point of departure. For my research, I applied the ‘*divergent*’ approach in order to evaluate “*the relative importance of cultural baggage*”, and how the social-economic factors of the country of destination determine migrants’ agency. The utility of comparative approach is that comparative research not only points out similarities and differences in the migrant experience, but it guides the researcher to reveal generalities to the migration experience (Foner, 2005).

All in all, it can be said that comparison of the same migrant population within two local contexts is a useful strategy to explore diversity and to interpret how local settings and socio-historical conditions effects humans’ agency; to study changing societal influences on attitudes (Ritchie and Lewis, 2003). For these reasons, it is also important to keep in mind the national and local context’s attributes in which the two case studies took place. These factors, which have been already analysed in Chapter 1, can be the migration policy of each country; the extent of economic

recession and its effects on construction industry; the organizational structure and the socio-historical evolution of the construction sector.

2.3 Methods of inquiry

As principal method of inquiry, I selected in-depth interviews with various social actors. From classic ethnographers (for instance Malinowski) to contemporary qualitative researchers, there is a consensus on the importance of people's personal accounts. Interview may have the form of a conversation (Burgess, 1984; Lofland and Lofland, 1995) with a purpose (Webb and Webb, 1932, p. 130). However, as Rubin and Rubin (1995) argue, an in-depth interview is quite different from a normal conversation, because of the objectives of the research, the roles of the researcher and that of the participant too.

According to Ritchie and Lewis (2003), face-to-face interviews are appropriate when the researcher seeks to gain deep insight and understanding of complex phenomena. Della Porta (2014) argues that in-depth interviews are particularly useful when the researcher is interested in grasping research subjects' interpretations, motives, beliefs and attitudes. The interviewer's role is not only to transmit the knowledge acquired during the interview, rather he sees the knowledge as "fruit" of the interaction with the interviewee (Legard and Ritchie, 1999).

Prior to start interviewing migrant builders, I spent a month designing the guides of the semi-structured interviews. I tried to develop a work plan taking into account the particular nature of the construction industry. In fact, a notable characteristic of this sector is the seasonality: economic activity rises during spring and summer months, while it falls during autumn and winter. This variation concerns more the construction labourers such as painters, carpenters and brick-masons, whereas electricians and plumbers are less affected. This change is more present in Milan where there is a colder climate during winter months, while in Athens there are high temperatures at times also during this period. My intention was also to interview some seasonal workers (especially in the Greek case) who migrate to Athens during the summer months to work in construction. I intended to carry out some interviews with builders during the winter, when they usually remain temporarily unemployed.

For this thesis, I interviewed different social actors who can be classified into eight general categories. For each of these groups, I prepared the interview guides that included questions with potential topics to be discussed.

- i. Migrant dependent workers
- ii. Migrant self-employed workers
- iii. Migrant employers/entrepreneurs
- iv. Trade unionists
- v. Migrant associations' representatives
- vi. Labour inspectors
- vii. Key informants
- viii. Other actors

In-depth interviews²⁰ should combine structure with flexibility (Legard and Ritchie, 1999). In general, interview questions' sequence was quite flexible, especially with migrant workers, whereas interviews with actors such as labour inspectors or trade unionists were quite structured; to some of them the interview guide had been sent in advance via email. I was not always asking key questions in the same way, rather I adopted a flexible approach, altering the sequence of the questions or the way in which they were structured.

Even if I was contemplating spending about six months in each context, difficulties in contacting research subjects, as will be presented below, made fieldwork research period last longer. Data collection lasted 16 months starting in end March 2015; I spent 9 months in Milan and 7 in Athens respectively (Table 2.1). The fact that I conducted interviews in four different periods, one succeeded the other, helped me to improve the guides and to realize on which aspect it was worth focusing more. During this time, I managed to collect a total of 54 interviews in Milan and 47 in Athens. When I realised that the material was really rich and consistent, I stopped the research.

Table 2.1 – Fieldwork research

Period		Research context
March to September 2015		First Round (IT): Milan
October 2015 to January 2016		First Round (GR): Athens
February to April 2016		Second Round (IT): Milan
May to July 2016		Second Round (GR): Athens
August 2016		Albania
Total	16 months of fieldwork research	Milan (9 months) , Athens (7 months), Albania (10 days)

²⁰At this point, it would be important to say that when I refer to in-depth interviews, it does not mean that no interview guide existed; for this reason, I do not use the term unstructured or non-standardised.

As for the techniques employed for each group, I opted to use more “indirect” questions with migrant workers and representatives of associations when compared to those with trade unionists. In many cases, interviews with migrants had the form of what Holstein and Gubrium (2008) call “*conversational machinery*”, through which meanings emerge. Interaction with interviewees is sequentially oriented in each talk and reflects the circumstances of its productions. When it was possible, I opted to employ the ‘*person-centred approach*’ (Levy and Hollan, 1998), that is I posed open-ended questions that permitted the interviewee to put forward the interview in way they prefer. This technique may allow participants to exert some control in designing the discussion, that in turn it would be proved very valuable in gaining data that could not be obtained with questioning of traditional social inquiry (Boyden and Ennew 1997, p.8). In the case of the labour inspectors, interviews with these informants can be categorised as ‘elite’ (Berry, 2002), as it seemed to me that they were very attentive on what they were answering, giving an expected politically correct answer²¹. That is why Berry (2002) argues that the interviewer should have in mind that the interviewee’s objectivity and sincerity should not be taken for granted; issues of validity do exist.

Throughout the course of this inquiry, I undertook also a document review in order to have a better understanding of the historical, political and social background, especially in the Italian case. These documents were primarily public (newspapers, official reports), and secondary private ones (letters and emails). On this subject, Prior suggests (2003) that the researcher may use data of documents to have a better insight on what happens within an organization or institution. Hence, many of the documents collected were material of trade unions’ archives, newspapers and records of press releases. In this way, I managed to gain an insight into the organization and structure of trade unions, about the number and members’ profile (age, nationality). Data was also collected from trade unions’ websites and online newspapers too. Analysis was also based on statistical data regarding migrant populations and economic situation in the two countries.

Despite my initial planning to carry out ethnographic research in both contexts for a 3 to 4 months period, working as a construction worker, this did not happen. The reasons for which this proved to be unfeasible varied in each context. In the Italian case, the main strategy I was contemplating

²¹ However, it cannot be said that all interviews with labour inspectors have the form of an elite interview; it was the case of one labour inspector in Athens who expressed personal views on Greek governments’ policy on informal economy.

employing in order to enter and work in a building site was that of going to parks or public spaces (street corners, squares) which are known as good places for immigrants to find a job. This method had been adopted by a journalist in Milan some years ago (Berizzi, 2008) who wrote a book on the working conditions of migrant builders; he had managed to find a job in this way. Nonetheless, as I analyse in Chapter 3, migrant construction workers do not gather at those places anymore, mainly due to a recent law that penalizes the informal labour intermediation, the low economic activity and the use of modern means of communication.

On the other hand, in Athens, the strategy to enter the field was through personal contacts working in the construction sector. Unfortunately, because of the low economic activity and the occasional way the people I know were working, they denied to me the access, even if I did not ask to be paid. Though, the true reason seems to lie in the cultural and friendly ties or kinship among Albanian workers. The comment of a self-employed painter is characteristic of how it is difficult for them to select to whom of their conational give a job.

“You enter in a café and you see many people... unemployed for months. I don’t know who to take. At times, I ask each one for how long he has been unemployed, so I can help the one who is really in need”. (Saban, aged 42, Milan)

In my case, it became therefore obvious that it would create problems to the person I had been given the job from, if someone of their fellow national knew that I worked with that employer. They would ask him about my presence and this would disrupt their relationships.

Even though I could not access any building site to do an ethnography, I engaged in the context in few particular instances in each city. Indeed, many times the researcher joins in some naturally-occurring activities in order to study a phenomenon as participant observer. According to Hammersley and Atkinson (1983, p. 249), *“all social research is form of participant observation as social researchers cannot study a phenomenon without being a part of it”*.

Differently from this generic definition, DeWalt and DeWalt (2002) argue that participant observation is a method that aims at gaining intimate familiarity with the group of subjects under inquiry and their actions; during this period, the researcher should be involved intensively with these subjects in their natural context. With regard to this method, there are four levels of participation in the field the researcher can employ: i) *‘complete participant’* (participating as a normal group member and concealing the research), ii) *‘participant-as-observer’* (researching the field while participating fully in it), iii) *‘observer-as-participant’* (participation in the field is limited and the role of researcher is to the fore) and iv) *‘complete observer’* (no participation in the field) (Gold, 1958). For my thesis, I undertook different roles as observer in various occasional ethnographic instances; that is the depth or the intensity of my involvement varied in each occasion. The most important of these observations are listed in the Tables 2.2 and 2.3 below.

Figure 2.2 – Observation in Milan

DATE and PLACE	EVENT	TOPIC, ACTION AND SCOPE
16-5-2015, Province of Milan	“Ethnic” dinner	Attendance at an ethnic dinner in which participated also people from Albania: interaction, trust building and looking for contacts
26-6-2015 – Milan	Observation of Milan squares	Ride the car in the early morning and go at places or parks known to be meeting points for migrant workers: Piazzale Cuoco, Corvetto.
29-6-2015 – Milan	Observation of Milan squares	Ride the car in the early morning and go at places or parks known to be meeting points for migrant workers: Piazzale Loreto, Piazza Maciachini, Piazzale Lotto.
12-7-2015, Province of Milan	Participation in a Migration Day	Manifestation for migrants and refugees rights. Interaction, trust building, looking for contacts
16-7-2015, Milan	Observation of Milan squares	Ride the car in the early morning and go at places or parks known to be meeting points for migrant workers: Lambrate Train Station, Lido Fieramilano city, San Siro Stadium
29-7-2015, Milan	Observation of Milan squares	Ride the car in the early morning and go at places or parks known to be meeting points for migrant workers: Piazzale Cuoco, Wholesale vegetable market of Milan
7-2-2016, Province of Milan	Sunday Catholic Mass	Sunday Mass in Albanian language: interaction, trust building, looking for contacts
2-8-2015, Province of Milan	Sunday Catholic Mass	Sunday Mass in Albanian language: interaction, trust building, looking for contacts
30-1-2016, Milan	Political Meeting	Attend the meeting between Mayor of Tirana Erion Veliah, Vice Mayor of Milan Francesca Balzani and Stefano Boeri architect Open to public Discussion for Tirana’s urban plan. Interaction, trust building, looking for contacts.
21-2-2016, Province of Milan	Observation at CGIL Office	Present at a trade unionist’s office interacting with and consulting two workers (one of whom was Albanian)
12,13-4-2016, Milan	Milan School of Construction	Interact with workers during the breaks in between the course they were attending.
20-4-2016, Milan	Milan School of Construction	Interact with workers during the breaks in between the course they were attending.

Making all these observations and talking or hanging out with social actors gave me the opportunity to acquire first-hand experiences. Engaging in trade unions’ activities, I observed the way they approach the workers in the working sites in Athens, as well as the way in which trade union members interact during the union gatherings. In other occasions, such as during the early morning investigation by car around Milan, I gained empirical data about the (non) existence of

contexts supposed to be meeting points for immigrants searching for a job in the Italian construction industry. My participation in various events such as associations' activities or church liturgies organized by the Albanian community in some cities around Milan, it was fundamental to increase my understanding about the way some Albanian associations act and the importance their members attribute to them. I visited also Albanian restaurants in both cities and I had the opportunity to discuss informally with many persons about some issues they were worried. Lastly, it is essential not to overlook the importance that all these interactions had had so that I built trust with research subjects.

Table 2.3 – Observation in Athens

DATE and PLACE	EVENT	TOPIC, ACTION AND SCOPE
25-10-2015, Athens	Yearly General Assembly of Builders' Trade Union of Athens	Attendance. Interaction and looking for contacts
10-11-2015, Satellite municipality	Weekly Assembly Builders' Trade Union (contiguous municipality)	Attendance. Interaction, trust building and looking for contacts
5-11-2015, Satellite municipality	Building site visit	Visit a building site dressed up as a trade unionist (helmet, reflective jacket) to attend the workers' assembly.
11-11-2015, Satellite municipality	Building site visit	Visit various building sites of Athens to inform the workers for an imminent strike.
12-11-2015, Athens	National strike	Participation in the manifestation with the picket of Builders' Trade Union of Athens
13-7-2016, Satellite municipality	Observing recruitment process at open place	Empirical Data Collection
14-7-2016, Satellite municipality	Observing recruitment process at open place	Empirical Data Collection

Data from observations were collected by using field notes, written up usually at the end of the day. These notes were either descriptive ones (to record for instance what happened in a specific event in relation to migrants), or more analytical ones that pieced some of my impression of that day. Even if (participant) observations were not systematic, they undoubtedly increased the quality of the research data and they allowed to capture some meanings that it could not be feasible to do so through interviews; not to mention that almost each occasion was crucial to find out new contacts to interview.

2.4 Approach and Sampling Strategy

In this section, I would like to discuss the general strategy to recruit participants for the inquiry. In March 2015, when I started the fieldwork research in Italy, I hardly knew few Albanian people in Milan. Those acquaintances put me initially in contact with a couple of Albanian migrant builders, and, in this way, I did the first interview in the end of March 2015. At the same time, I started writing to various Albanian associations located in Milan and satellite cities in order to access possible informants and interviewees. I initially sent more than 15 emails to various associations, but only few of them answered me. The second step was to call some of the associations' representatives, since their phone number was available on the web. After several phone calls, some representatives have been available to put me in contact with some construction workers and entrepreneurs.

Since the beginning of the research planning, I was contemplating using the snowball technique to select research subjects working in the construction industry. I could not have access to pre-existing lists of migrant dependent and/or independent construction workers, since the only existing record books at the Construction Workers' Social Security Fund (Cassa Edile) or at the Chamber of Commerce are not available for researchers in Milan; no reliable lists exist in Athens. In contrast, it is true that many migrants work informally, and their names do not appear anywhere. Hence, given the nature of the research and the fact that it was not possible to get hold of a sampling frame for the target population, snowball sampling technique seemed to be the most appropriate method to approach migrant workers. This method is well suited in "hard-to-reach" population and/or when the focus of study is on a sensitive issue (Biernacki *et al.*, 1981). Furthermore, snowball approach has a particular value in responding to changing network circumstances and its flexibility is not available with pre-existing lists (Doreian *et al.*, 1992).

Unexpectedly, snowball sampling technique was minimally practicable, since only few initial research subjects were served as "seeds" through which I could recruit more subjects. In the past, many scholars studying migrant populations have detected high levels of suspicion by migrants towards both the host society and each other (for Albanian people see for instance: Kosic and Triandafyllidou, 2003; Vathi and King, 2013). These studies usually involved migrants without documents, or having few years of immigration experience in the host country. In my case, Albanians are not anymore considered a new migrant community neither in Italy nor in Greece, but rather they are the most well-integrated migrant group in both countries (Mai, 2011; Gemi, 2013). However, without neglecting the fact that suspicion is something that may still exist, I believe that it was more the migrants' financial situation and problems deriving from unemployment and the concomitant impoverishment of numerous workers the reasons for which initial contacts did not put me in contact with other fellow nationals. It would be quite hard for

many of them to speak about unpleasant events to an unknown person. From my initial contacts' part, it was not easy even for them to call any relative or friend to ask them to dedicate time to narrate to me uneasy events. In several occasions, it was also the unwillingness of migrants, who were carrying on some economic activity, to contact unemployed fellow national colleagues, with whom they had not professional relations anymore²². It can be also assumed that migrant builders involved in informal working arrangements would regard me with distrust, and would not speak about their illicit economic activities.

In both contexts, there have been associations that corresponded with interest to my research project and provided many contacts, whereas some others did not welcome my research, being scarcely available and helpful. In some cases, associations' representatives answered me sharply that they did not know any person working in the construction industry, something that sounded as a false pretence. It seems quite impossible that a president of an Albanian association do not have any contacts with people working in construction, since the majority of his/her fellow national are employed, or had been employed in this sector. When I asked to an individual who made part of an association to give me some more contacts, he asked whether I had called [name of Albanian association in Milan]:

Association Member: But, did you try to call [name of association]?

ID: yes, I did. The president said they don't know anyone working in the construction sector.

Association Member: What?! Really, they answered you like this? Hahaha! They're lying! It is impossible they know no Albanian builders. They don't want to cooperate. They don't care about cooperation! They act always like this. (Field notes, February 2016)

Consequently, the majority of the interviewees have been initial contacts and the sample was expanded through personal acquaintances, trade unionists, associations, the Milan School of Construction (ESEM – Ente Scuola Edile Milanese), and a variety of other events.

As for the Milan School of Construction, I contacted the Director to ask him some information about the activities of that institution. He kindly accepted to be interviewed, and, after that, he corresponded positively to my request to interview migrant workers who would attend some training courses. He permitted me to present myself to the attendants of a couple of courses and to ask if there would be someone interested to be involved in the inquiry. As an incentive for the

²²The problem of negotiating access during the global recession of 2008-9 has been also reported by Sage (2013, p. 103) who gained access within a construction company after laborious efforts. Firing of personnel with which contacts had been already established, and suspiciousness towards the researcher made it difficult to gain trust and carry out ethnographic research.

research subjects, it was given the permit for each concerned person to be absent from the course for about half an hour. In this way, I managed to interview some participants (migrant workers and key informants), before, after or during the training courses. All interviews were carried out face-to-face in an office that the Directory disposed for this task.

In my effort to find out new contacts, I got also in touch with an Albanian online newspaper through a colleague of mine, and they permitted me to post a notification about my project in which I invited people to participate in the inquiry. Even if I thought that it had been failed from the very beginning, I finally received a written answer to my email from a student whose father works as self-employed builder. In this two-page email, the student briefly described the evolution of his father economic activity during the last 10 years.

As for the institutional actors, I approached the trade union representatives by email or by phone, using the information available on trade unions' websites. Additionally, I contacted other trade unionists with the help of some Italian colleagues of mine. As for the labour inspectors, I got in contact with a couple of them during a formative course for police officers organised by the region of Lombardy in which they participated as instructors. I gained access through my co-supervisor Domenico Perrotta who participated in the course as instructor, and, in this way, I approached two labour inspectors. In their turn, expressing their interest about my research, they put me in contact with some colleagues of theirs who specialized in the construction industry. Two other labour inspectorates (INAIL and ASL) were contacted by email, since their contacts were available on the web. However, I could not manage to interview any labour inspector who work in the Labour Inspectorate of the Ministry of Labour (Direzione Territoriale del Lavoro di Milano-Lodi - Ministero del Lavoro e delle Politiche Sociali). To my request via email to conduct an interview with an expert on the construction sector, accompanied also by the interview guide, the Director, instead of giving me the permit, sent me a brief written answer without much information.

Regarding the Greek context, the strategy was quite similar, as the snowball technique was equally ineffective. Thus, I was mainly based on my personal contacts to recruit the research subjects. The contribution of various associations was crucial as well in Athens, despite the fact that many of them are not active anymore. A notable difference on the answers given to me by initial interviewed subjects when they were asked to put me in contact with other compatriots of theirs, it was that Albanians of Athens justified their inability to present me to another worker because "*the majority of their friends and kinship members working in this sector have returned to Albania*". Indeed, the number of returnees from Greece to Albania is higher in comparison with those who returned from Italy to their country of origin (Gemi, 2013). Especially, for some

specializations such as brick-masons, ironers, carpenters, it was generally argued that the majority of those workers had left Greece.

In Athens, I approached one labour inspector through an acquaintance of mine who has been working many years on informal economic issues from different positions. Differently, Social Insurance Institute's (IKA) labour inspectors were contacted by email and phone available on the web.

From previous research (Vathi and King, 2013), I was aware that fixing an appointment with migrants would not be straightforward and there would be many practical challenges. Being a mason means left home early in the morning and returned in the afternoon. In order to offset this challenge, the majority of interviews were held in the afternoons/evenings or during weekends. Some migrants, despite their initial will to be interviewed, declined meet me due to lack of time.

Trying to find out new contacts was a time consuming task, since I have always tried to be polite when I was contacting initial interviewees, by giving them the time they need to contact and ask their acquaintances whether they would like to participate in the inquiry. At the same time, it was psychologically demanding and arduous to take an appointment with migrant workers, since the majority of those working had little free time; or, they did not have stable working hours, as they were working occasionally. As a result, many times interview appointments were postponed, since it turned out that the workers had to go to work for that day for an occasional work; or, to take care of their children as their wives were busy.

2.5 The interview process

The majority of the interviews in both contexts were conducted in cafés or parks, but I interviewed also immigrants in trade unions' offices, and at associations' headquarters. A couple of migrants were interviewed at the building site where they were working, and, as I have already referred, some interviews were also conducted at the headquarters of the Milan School of Construction. I was also invited by one immigrant in each context to conduct the interview at his home, while a couple of migrants were interviewed at my place both in Milan and Athens. In Greece, one interview was conducted in a provincial city, many kilometres far from Athens. The interviews approximately lasted from half an hour to two hours.

In this point, I feel the need to say that the overwhelming majority of research subjects offered me the coffee or the beer we drank during the interview, and only a couple of persons accepted to be offered the drink. Even if I was always asking them after the end of the interview to offer the drink, it was quite impossible to convince them; most of them were saying "*you are a student*

now. It's me who pays". For some of them, it was also a question of proud, since I was younger than they, and, mainly in the Italian context, they saw me as host in their country.

The majority of interviews with migrant workers were recorded both in Milan and Athens, and only few subjects were reluctant to be tape-recorded. In order to build trust with interviewees, I explained to them the goals of the research project, ensuring them for the confidentiality and the anonymity of any eventual citation in my dissertation. By contrast, the majority of them had no problem to be registered; rather, before we start the interview, many of them made more or less the same joke, saying laughingly "*there's no problem if you record me, as long as police do not arrest me*"!

All interviews with trade unionists and association members were recorded in both cities. Interviews with labour inspectors were recorded in Milan, but, on the contrary, no labour inspector in Athens accepted so. Greek labour inspectors explained me that they did not have the right as civil servants to be interviewed without official permission. For the sake of saving time, I did not insist on, nor I decided to make official demands to the ministry, as it would have been an extremely time consuming demand, without being sure for the result. Rather, I noticed that labour inspectors in Greece spoke more openly than their Italian colleagues, expressing at times personal views and, not hesitating accusing other institutional actors. The interviews with trade unionists lasted approximately from half an hour to one hour and half, whereas the average duration of those with labour inspectors was about 45 minutes.

The transcription of each interview was done in original language (Italian or Greek), and only the citations used for justifying the findings were translated in English.

2.6 Sampling

In Milan, I conducted interviews with 18 Albanian immigrant dependent workers; 9 self-employed workers (some of them "bogus"); and, 2 construction employers, one employing 15, and the other 4 workers. In Athens, I managed to interview 18 Albanian dependent workers, 8 small-scale self-employed workers (most of them not registered); and 6 employers/entrepreneurs. All the interviewees are first generation immigrants, and only one of them is born in Athens. Only one participant is originated from the Greek minority in Albania, and one participant in Italy is originated from FYROM, but has also the Albanian nationality; ethnicity did not have significance in data analysis. Finally, concerning the trade/sector inside the construction industry, only two of the interviewees currently work in a sector other than residential housing.

Table 2.4 – Research interviews

Social Actors	Milan	Athens	Amount
Migrants			
Workers	18	18	36
Self-employed workers	9	8	17
Employers – Entrepreneurs	2	6	8
Institutional Actors			
Trade Unions’ representatives	13	4	17
Labour Inspectors	2	4	6
Institution for the Prevention of Accidents at Work	1	1	2
Officer of the Directorate of Aliens and Immigration	0	1	1
Associations’ representatives	2	2	4
Small and Medium size companies’ consultant	1	0	1
Director Construction School	1	0	1
Key informants			
Native construction workers	2	3	5
Egyptian construction worker	1	0	1
Albanian professionals in other sectors	1	1	2
Architects	1	1	2
Total amount of interviews	54	49	103

As for migrant workers’ individual characteristics, only 6 participants (3 in Athens, 3 in Milan) are single or without family, whereas the great majority of migrants live in Italy or Greece with his family. Concerning the age of participants: in Greece, 1 aged from 20-30; 21 aged 30-45 years old, and 10 aged over 45. In Italy, 4 participants are 20 to 30 years old, 16 are 30 to 45 years old, and 9 are over 45 years old.

As for the Trade Unions’ representatives, I interviewed 13 trade unionists in Milan and satellite cities: 5 from CGIL, 3 from CISL, 2 from UIL, 1 from USB, 2 from CUB. 11 trade unionists of my sampling occupy with the construction sector, while 2 of them are responsible for immigration questions. 6 out of 13 trade unionists were non Italians; it was not a deliberate choice, but rather the very same migrant trade unionists were offered to be interviewed when they have been told by their Italian colleagues about my research. By the way, I realized that it was a great opportunity to find out more research subjects through Albanians working for the Trade Unions as salaried officials. Finally, the Didactic Director of the Milan School of Construction was also accepted to be interviewed, as well as a consultant for small and medium size construction companies in

Lombardy (CNA Lombardia) who provides consultancy and accounting services to self-employed and entrepreneurs.

In Athens, I interviewed the President of the Greek Federation of Builders and Associated Professions and the President of the Builders' Trade Union of Athens. I interviewed the Chamber of Labour's Secretariat of Foreign Workers and the Chamber of Labour's Consultant for Migrant Workers (Labour's Institute of Labour of the General Confederation of Greek Workers (INE-GSEE)). The reason for which I did not try to interview more trade unionists is due to the structure of Greek trade unions of the construction sector, and the common ideological line of local trade unions' in the various municipalities Athens, as explained in the Chapter 1.

In both contexts, employer unions' representatives declined to be interviewed "*due to lack of time*", or because they did not see the reason for which their views could be of interest for this inquiry. Conducting interviews with Representatives of Temporary Employment Agency Association proved problematic too. In Milan, I tried to contact three different associations by email. Since no association answered me, I decided to call them. Only one out of these three associations gave me some initial availability, but, at the end, I never managed to fix an appointment, as they could not find any free time for me. In the Greek case, I contacted two Associations, and, also in this case, I received no response to the initial emails. I managed to contact the President of PASIGEE (the National Association of TEAs) by phone, but he kindly declined, saying that he had already had a bad experience of this kind of inquiries, since his sayings had been misrepresented in a previous research.

Regarding the labour inspectors who accepted to be interviewed for the research in Milan, the first was official of the Italian National Social Security Institution (INPS), the second was official of the National Institution for the Prevention of Accidents at Work (INAIL). I interviewed also the Local Health Administration of Milan (ASL), who has also inspector duties. Despite the initial intention of one inspector to allow me to have access to some documents that contain information about cases of complaints by migrant workers to the Inspectorate, or to some drafting of reports during inspections, no document has been available to me at the end. In Athens, data were collected by three officials of the Hellenic Labour Inspectorate (SEPE) of the Ministry of Labour (one of whom answered to my questions in written form), and with one Labour Inspector of the Social Security Institute (IKA). In addition, I interviewed one official of the Greek Institute of Health and Safety at Work (EL.IN.Y.A.E), which has only consultative role, and not control power.

As regards Associations, I conducted also interviews with two Albanian Cultural Associations' presidents in Milan, whereas I had many informal conversations with members of various Albanians organizations. To understand better the reality about Albanian Associations in Athens

I interviewed the President of the Federation of Albanian Associations in Greece. An interview was also conducted with a president of a migrant association in Athens.

I had also informal discussions with various key informants through which I gathered indispensable data and helped me to cross-check the findings retrieved from interviews and occasional observation in both settings. In Athens, I conducted an interview with three Greek construction worker, two of whom have been for many years involved in trade unionist activities. An Albanian entrepreneur in catering sector and a native architect gave me also useful insights for the phenomenon under study. In Italy, I interviewed two Italian builders, one of whom had acted as informal broker (*caporale*), and an Egyptian builder who has usually got job through informal intermediaries. I had also informal meetings with one Albanian architect and one Albanian journalist working in Italy. All these informants helped me to understand micro-cultural and structural aspects within the construction sector that were crucial for understanding participants' behaviours and for empirical material analysis.

On August 2016, I made a trip in Albania for ten days. My objective was to meet some of my participants and to have first-hand impressions of the situation in their home country. I encountered some of them in different Albanian cities, and one of them invited me at their home, where he offered me the lunch. During these days, I achieved to gain a general picture of the situation in Albania by visiting some of the biggest cities of the country and some villages, and having informal discussions with some of my interviewees.

During my fieldwork research, I always carried with me my mobile phone, a notebook, a digital recorder in any activity related to the research project. I avoided taking pictures during the occasional ethnographic research given the covered identity I usually had. I was also keeping notes in an electronic diary after the interviews and important things happening in the field.

2.7 Reflections on the researcher's positionality

The positionality of the researcher might be a pitfall in any qualitative inquiry when s/he opts to employ the phenomenological approach to produce data. As has discussed by Mullings (1999, p.337) positionality consists in a “*unique mix of race, class, gender, nationality, sexuality and other identifiers*”. These characteristics do not remain static; rather, they may shift in different contexts and time; when the researcher interacts with different research subjects. In other words, the researcher's identity plays an important role when collecting and analysing data, since his/her position in relation to those participating in the research affect the perception of participants for him, as well as their attitude towards him. For this reason, it is of extreme importance that the researcher can be reflective, that is s/he should be in position to evaluate how her/his identity

influenced the research; to make a personal account of the methodology; or, to reflect on her/his personal actions.

The identity of the researcher defines whether s/he is an insider or an outsider in the case inquired. Insider-outsider theory derives from research on indigenous population, according to which only indigenous researchers can adequately study indigenous people, given that outsiders are not able to comprehend the status, the culture and the societies of alien groups (Merton, 1996). The researcher is an insider when s/he shares the characteristics, the role or the experience of a group under inquiry; otherwise, s/he is an outsider. On the other hand, some scholars argue that insiders are the ideal individuals to collect and analyse data provided they have no idea about the phenomenon that is being studied (Asselin, 2003). Somewhere in between, other scholars (see for instance Acker, 2001; Naples, 2003) suggest that the boundaries between the insider and outsider are not always distinct, rather researcher's positionality is being constantly negotiated, and it may shift according to time and setting.

My identity as a Greek male graduate student maybe affected interviewees' responses and attitudes towards me in different ways in each context, since my position was contextually bounded, as in any comparative study. In the case of Italy, I was almost clearly an outsider, since I shared only one common characteristic with the research subjects, that of being non-Italian, whereas in Athens I was an outsider for migrants workers.

As regards the migrant builders, the fact that I am male created more confidence between me and the respondents. As Thiel (2007, p.228) argues, constructions workers' cultures "*are embedded in a form of physical masculinity*" that represents a "*collective value system*", and it is attached to an outdated tradition still existing in the modern state. It would be, therefore, more difficult for a female researcher to gain this kind of confidentiality with male builders.

As for the religion, it should not be generally considered as a crucial characteristic to be evaluated, since the majority of the interviewees were atheists or non-practicing. Even those practicing of any religion (Muslims, Christians) they are latitudinarian, having grown up in an atheist communist state. Indeed, Barjaba (2004, p. 234) states that "*Albania had demonstrated an exceptional pattern of tolerance and peaceful cohabitation between its religious communities*".

The majority of the interviewees who had migrated in the past to Greece and Albanians who still live in Greece recounted good experiences of how Greek people treated and hosted them. At times, Albanians in Italy felt nostalgia when they were speaking about the first immigration years in Greece.

[...] when I arrived in Greece, I was 15 years. I was a child. The family I worked for gave me a room to sleep and food every day. My boss' wife was treating me like a son! I can never forget those people. (Isuf, aged 39, Milan)

In contradistinction, they felt quite aversion for the Greek state for a series of reasons of the past. Greece has never been an ally of Albania, and Albanians' stances on Greek state and authorities are quite negative.

[...] the Greek state and the police? Terrible! I cannot understand what we had done, so they treated us like that... how many times we received poundings by the police without any reason! (Isuf, aged 46, Milan)

Relations between Greece and Albania have been somewhat problematic, since the foundation of the modern Albanian state (Batt *et al.*, 2008). Apart from territorial claims during the Balkan Wars (1912-13) and the First World War, both parts have accused each other of not respecting ethnic minorities' rights in each national state. The first national question concerns Muslim Albanian groups having resided in the Greek-Albanian border, known as Chamidhes. According to many scholars (see for instance Mazower, 2001) and the Albanian claims, these communities have been forcibly displaced from their ancestors' land during the Balkan wars of 1912-1913 until 1940s, and their properties have been confiscated. Conversely, the Cham issue has never been existed for the modern Greek state, since Greek governments have never recognised the persecution of Albanian ethnic minorities from its territory.

On the other hand, the Greek state has traditionally drawn attention to the Greek communities residing in Southern Albania whose rights have been infringed by the Albanian state, as it always stated (Tzanelli, 2006). Rather, for Greek governments these populations are Greek, that region is usually named "Northern Epirus" and its Greek populations "Northern Epirotes" (in Greek Voreioepiotes, whilst Southern Epirus region makes part of the modern Greek state). Additionally, the fact that there has been a traditional alliance between Greece and Serbia based on a Christian Orthodoxy consistency, it has also fomented the relations between the Greek and the Albanian state, since relationships between Albania and Serbia have been usually conflictual (Draper, 1997). Finally, mass surveillance policies of Greek authorities and police mistreatment of non-EU citizens (Samatas, 2003), especially during the first years of Albanian inflows to Greece, has deteriorated Albanians' representation of the modern Greek state.

In this perspective, it becomes evident enough that my identity as Greek has caused a sample bias and auto-selectivity for the research subjects. From my part, I tried from the very beginning to make clear to all Albanians I contacted that I was a researcher vehemently opposed to Greek state and authorities' violent attitude to immigrants in general. Only in this way, Albanians residing in Athens, who were initially hesitant about speaking against Greek reality, spoke openly and

expressed their views on impulse. On the contrary, that it was not the case in Milan where Albanian builders feel more comfortable to speak frankly against Italian state for instance, since I am not Italian.

With regard to my encounters and interviews with institutional actors (trade unions, inspectors), it was easy for me to ask questions that might be considered “sensitive” or simply of “common sense” in the Italian case, as they saw me as a foreigner knowing few things about Italy and Italian construction sector. As a consequence, I could ask also things that are believed to be known by everyone. It is worth mentioning that during some encounters with trade unionists, they were starting answering to my question about the actual situation in construction after the global financial crisis, by making a long presentation (even 25 minutes in one instance) to give me the framework of the Italian construction sector over the last 50 years. By way of contrast, I was an insider for the trade unionists and labour inspectors in Athens, and it was harder to me to ask what I had asked if I was an outsider.

In both contexts, my positionality was a very important issue on which I paid special attention. While it was impossible for me to start with a “clean theoretical slate” (Eisenhardt, 1989, p.13) recognizing the indirect influence of my identity in the research process, I tried to relinquish control over the migrant interviewees, and to allow them to control the progress of the interview. I attempted to be open, honest and profoundly interested in the research subjects’ experiences. I do not think that my position affected the quality of the data, since, for instance, many respondents in Italy spoke out about their dissatisfaction for Italian state or employers, or even about their aversion to Greek state and police; correspondingly, many migrants in Athens openly expressed negative opinions on Greek institutions and racist views of parts of Greek society. In any case, the importance should be more on how data is analysed, and less to the information collected itself.

Another issue worthy of mention about my positionality is that many research subjects misunderstood my identity, and they took me for a journalist both in Italy and in Greece. Thus, I had to explain many times my identity and the reason for which I had contacted them, although in many cases without any success.

[...] did you understand Mr. journalist what am I saying?

ID: yes, I do. But I’m not a journalist. I am doing this research for the university...

And after some instances, once again:

I swear you Mr. Journalist, it was like this. I swear! You have to say everything in the television, in the newspaper. (Behar, aged 69, Athens)

Or, during another interview:

...so, at the end, are you going to conduct some TV transmission? If you invite me, I have no problem to say what I am saying to you now on the television. (Luftar, aged 54, Athens)

Some migrants in both contexts were curious about my interest on them, and they were sometimes perplexed why I had decided to carry out that inquiry during a period of low economic activity for the construction industry. I had to explain them the research's rationale continuously. When some of them were asking me why I was so interested in migrants, I revealed to them personal information about my ancestors; I narrated to them about my grand-grand fathers' Greek Pontic origin and the fact that they had been refugees in Greece, leaving their birth-lands around the Black Sea in Turkey to spare their lives from the massacres by the Turkish National Movement in the aftermath of the First World War. This narration was very determinant to establish trust with them, as I made them understand that I was familiar with inflicative refugee storytelling and how dramatic is for an individual to be expelled from their homeland. In contrast, the fact that I was also a migrant in Italy did not make them feel closer to me, since their representation of what being a migrant means, is too far from being a Greek student in an Italian University. Most of them reacted like this:

ID: I am also an immigrant here you know.

No. it's too different. You are not an immigrant here, you are a student in another country.

And, then you are an EU citizen!

In some other instances, the participants expected some advocacy from my side, or they asked for offering them some help. One interviewee who was living next to my place in Athens asked me to offer after-school lessons to his son to help him with passing the school exams in mathematics at that period. Even if I explained him that I was not familiar with teaching mathematics to secondary school pupils, I finally dedicated a couple of hours for his son, since he was insisting for. To "repay" me – even if I asked nothing from him - he promised to find me two other interviewees to be involved in my inquiry. Another individual in Milan asked me money because he had recently had an accident at work, and he was in difficulty. I said him that I hardly made ends meet every month; I could give him any kind of help but money.

It is a case in point the example of a contactor in Athens who might wait a "return" from me, even in the future. Being aware of the likelihood one researcher has to work in public institutions, he put me in contact with other fellow nationals supposing that I might repay it one day in the future. The next dialogue took place in a somehow inelegant way between two Albanians in a café in Athens, while I was present:

Café owner: [...] Come on! You have to help Iraklis, he seems a good guy!

T: Of course I will! Maybe, we will need him in the future if we will meet up him in some public service!

Café owner: Come on! What are you saying now?

T: I say nothing wrong...(smiling)... you never know what it is going to happen!

(Taulant, aged 34, Athens)

Finally, regarding the presentation of the self during the interviews with migrant builders, I opted for a regular dress style. I was usually wearing jeans with a plain shirt, and during the hot summer months in Athens I opted for walking shorts and a T-shirt. In this way, I think that they felt more comfortable with me, especially those who were interviewed immediately after they had finished the working day.

2.8 Data analysis

The aim of my thesis was to explore and understand aspects related to migrants' working lives in the construction industry and their coping practices during the crisis. It entails that individuals shared with me their experiences and their personal construction about the reality. This is what Creswell (2003) names as interpretivist philosophy, that is the subjective constructivist perspectives of individuals; how the people make sense of a socially and historically constructed reality. In such cases, researchers' goal could not be the measurement of social phenomena, but the focus is on subjects' meanings and understandings of lived experiences. What it is studied in this thesis is the individuals' perceptions and interpretations' of reality, and it was, therefore, the interpretivist (constructivist) paradigm that formed the ontological basis of my work.

Within the interpretivist paradigm it is located the phenomenological inquiry, that is the "*description of things as one experiences them, or of one's experiences of things*" (Hammond *et al.*, 1991, p.1), in a specific '*contest of discovery*' (Guba and Lincoln, 1994). Phenomenology requires that the researcher understand the perspective of those who experience a lived situation and grasp aspects of social reality of what research subject see. Individuals' interpretations of what they experience is an essential part of what they have lived (Patton, 1990). Hence, it does not entail that the researcher may provide generalizable laws, rather he should seek to describe and interpret the meanings of social actions. In this respect, Denzin and Lincoln (1994) underline individuals' incapacity to provide full explanations of their actions and thoughts, and they argue that what all subjects can do is to recount their experiences and to justify why they acted in a specific way. The themes of the inquiry will emerge by the data the inquirer will have collect (Creswell, 2009).

After having conducted the interviews, transcribed all sound material and collected any written source, the data analysis process followed three stages. First, I read all participants' interviews

putting a label next to each interesting piece of written speech. Then, with the use of Nvivo analytical software I organized and coded my data. Finally, the data were analysed.

2.9 Challenges of the research

An important challenge of my fieldwork research had to do with the languages, with regard to both conducting the interviews and writing up the research. The interviews in Italy were conducted in Italian; in Greek language in Greece. It may well be argued that my inability to speak Albanian meant that it would be distorting for respondents non to be interviewed in their mother tongue (Levy and Hollan, 1998). This problem might create a gap from what respondents would have said if they were speaking in Albanian. However, with respect to my case studies, Albanians in both countries have many years of immigration and they generally speak adequately the local languages. I did not face language barriers, as I focused on settled migrants working also before the economic crisis; all my interviewees had at least 10 years of migration experience (only one arrived in 2007). Of course, some meanings might have been slightly altered because interviewees did not speak in their mother tongue, or others might have been lost in translation.

Conducting the interviews in Italian was not a problem, since I had already studied Italian language when I was a Bachelor's student. In addition, I frequented quite exclusively Italian people during my abidance in Italy, with whom I used to speak Italian. I was given some help by my colleagues, when I was creating the interview guide, especially on how to form the questions so they be easily comprehensible for migrants.

As it has been already said, the biggest challenge I met was the difficulty to find out participants. This problem is not only arisen from researcher's positionality and people's scepticism towards any kind of research from which they have no return, but also from the fact that I shifted often locations. Doing research in two different national contexts caused major difficulties. One of those was that any time I shifted contexts, it has been very time consuming to re-establish my contacts and continue from where I had stopped. Another difficulty connected to the cross-national research has to do with methodological aspects, given that research methods are contextually bounded and vary in each case. In this respect, it is the institutional context that is quite different in two countries (see for instance trade unions' structure), or the data officially published on the web (less data available in the Greek case) that constrain or enable research activity. Practical challenges concern the means of public transportation and the distances in each context that made me spend a lot of time in my daily program. In the case of Athens, long distances, problematic function of some public means lines and frequent strikes made it hard to arrange appointments and save time.

2.10 Methodology limitations

Case studies have undoubtedly contributed to the building of in-depth understandings in social science. However, they have been criticized for being non-representative and unable to produce general laws. In fact, the extent to which a case study can be of relevance beyond the sample and context of the research itself is the Achilles's heel of all qualitative researches. On the other hand, as many scholars argue (see for instance Ritchie and Lewis, 2003; Yin, 2014), the findings of qualitative research may allow for generalisations under certain circumstances, and mainly when those are reliable and valid.

Reliability and validity of each case study is of major importance. Reliability concerns the repeatability and accuracy provided by a procedure of measurement, and validity refers to the "correctness and precision" of a research reading (Ritchie and Lewis, 2003). According to the typology proposed by Denzin (1978), the researcher may verify the validity of her/his research by having different data sources (e.g. different persons, various times and place), by applying a number of methods (e.g. participant observation, interviews, document review) or by collaborating with another researcher or by applying different theories. For this dissertation, I chose to pick triangulation sources that complement each other. I interviewed various social actors in different times and places, whose interests were at times contradictory, and, with combination with occasional observations, I tried to triangulate my sources. I used also different data type from interview recordings, statistics and various documents.

2.11 Ethics

At the very start of the research, I was contemplating the obtaining of informed consent from research participants. However, I never decided to ask it from my research participants. The reason for which I did not opt to obtain the written consent²³ of my research subjects was the fear that this might act as a disincentive to engage them in the research; more suspicion would create towards me. Having in mind the general suspiciousness of Albanians towards associations (Mai, 2010) and researchers (Kosic and Triandafyllidou, 2003; Vathi and King, 2013), and given my positionality, as discussed above, I considered wiser not to ask the informed consent, as it could alienate them from me, and it might caused discomfort, or even worse, they would not accept to be recorded or be interviewed at all.

²³ Even if there is an international trend to increasingly use ethical committees, and obtaining informed consents, Social and Political Studies Departments of Italian Universities do not usually implement such a policy, but participants are protected by privacy laws and regulations.

For my research project, I sought to guarantee the privacy of all participants protecting their identity and any sensitive data given to me. I ensured them to anonymise all data, including the research location. I also endeavoured to ensure reciprocity not by offering some payment, rather than I expressed my gratitude by thanking them for the time they dedicated to me, or by expressing my intention to offer them a drink or a coffee, even if in the most cases they did not accept it. Only in one case, I paid one migrant worker to be interviewed, because he asked me for, and it seemed the only opportunity I had to collect data from a builder searching job at a street corner in Athens during the early morning hours. From their part, some participants ask me to “*write everything*” they said, especially when expressing their reproach either for institutional actors such as police, state, labour inspectorates and trade unions, or for manipulative employers or intolerant and racist behaviours from local society. It reflected the need to be heard; to express their voice publicly, since they had never been asked for in the past. And I tried to did it as best I could, believing that it was the minimum I could do to compensate all participants for their time and the information they offered me.

Chapter 3

Getting a job in residential construction

3.1 Introduction

The first aim of this dissertation is to examine how migrants use different channels of recruitment to resist to crisis effects. For this purpose, I cast light on the recruitment channels that Albanian builders use to find employment in the residential construction in Milan and Athens. These channels are generally distinguished into formal and informal channels through which my respondents find jobs during the recession period (Granovetter, 1974). The study of migrant recruitment has been of great sociological relevance, because it has enabled understandings on the evolution of spontaneous labour migration from developing to developed countries (Piore, 1979; Portes, 1995).

Long periods of low activity in construction, and the concomitant unemployment for migrant builders in both contexts have constrained informal social networks' effectiveness in providing information about job opportunities. Although numerous immigrants have responded to these restrictions by moving out of this sector and developing a range of coping practices (Chapter 5), there have also been many migrant builders who have continued to pursue their building trades, and found jobs, predominantly, through their informal networks. It is, therefore, of significant importance to explore how Albanian builders' social capital has been used during the economic recession period, and which factors have affected social capital durability. Hence, I draw upon social network and social capital concepts; bonding and bridging social capital; weak and strong ties. In doing so, I seek to identify the factors that enable Albanian builders to carry on working in the Italian and Greek residential construction.

In second place, it is of great significance to reflect on alternative channels that migrants have used to continue to exercise their building trade. For many of them, informal networks do not provide information for job opportunities anymore. Hence, I focus on both formal and informal channels of recruitment. On the one hand, I focus on various informal methods, such as illicit hiring through brokers or looking for job in open public spaces. On the other hand, I discuss the formal pathways through which immigrants may get a job in residential construction, such as through temporary work agencies and searching on the internet²⁴. Drawing upon migrants and

²⁴ Search on the internet cannot be considered a formal channel per se, but it largely depends on the selection procedure, that is for instance the type of evaluation process.

trade unionists' representations, I analyse how (or whether) the formalization of job search in construction may be effective.

Throughout the analysis of my empirical material, while I discuss *survival*, *tactical* and *strategic* practices, I associate certain actions to specific types of migrants. In particular, I propose a typology of three different migrant profiles: (1) the *Entrapped*, (2) the *Expectant*, (3) the *Dynamic*. In this Chapter, in particular, the three profiles have the follow characteristics:

Entrapped is the male migrant who has been unemployed for long-term periods, and has not job opportunities outside the construction. He has quite exclusively relied on bonding and strong social ties to get information on jobs during his work career. His financial capital is usually weak, and household survival depends upon his wife's employment. The *entrapped* migrants did not acquire skills to increase their employability during the crisis, because of their attachment to their work identity and masculine culture. They are often middle-aged (over 45) persons, at times with little capacity to reinsert in the labour market.

Expectant migrants have faced unemployment periods during the economic crisis, their savings are limited, and their wife's income has been crucial to maintain family members. They might have increased their employability, by acquiring new skills or reutilizing those acquired in the past. They have extended social networks, and they socialize with native people too. They stand by until new opportunities (in construction) come.

The third category regards the most *dynamic* profile of migrants in the sense that they are more able to mobilise resources to achieve their goals. *Dynamic* migrants usually possess the financial capital that permits them to invest in the host country or to become self-employed workers. They may continue to work in the construction sector as second job-holders, and they rely basically on bridging and weak social ties. They have proficiency in Italian or Greek, and they reskill in construction to ensure their trade.

The chapter begins with a brief literature review on the job search of immigrants from an economic sociological standpoint. Then, I cite some relevant research on the Italian and Greek labour market and, in particular, within the construction industry. It follows an analysis of my research findings. First, I analyse the informal channels through which migrants get information for job opportunities: strong and weak social ties, informal brokers (Italian case), street corner labour market. Second, I examine migrants' efforts to secure their employment in the construction sector through formal channels, such as temporary employment agencies, and internet. The chapter closes with some conclusions on the factors that ensured continuity in building trades, and I propose a typology for brokers intermediating in the Italian construction sector. The chapter does not discuss individuals' social mobility, that is how Albanians move between occupations,

something that is explored in Chapter 5 where I analyse migrants' and household tactics during the recession years.

3.2 Literature Review

3.2.1 Job Search and migrants

Research on mechanisms of job allocation has indicated that low status individuals draw mainly on their informal networks when seeking a job (Granovetter, 1973; 1995; Wegener, 1991). Based on previous research, Granovetter showed how the majority of jobs are got informally, through contacts such as friends and relatives, or by direct application to the employer; even more likely for people at the onset of their career; for young people; for those with low education level (Marsden and Hurlbert, 1988). Vulnerable groups also, such as less-skilled, long-term unemployed and disadvantaged workers were more likely to find a job through state employment agencies or job centres, whereas unemployed men were more likely to find a job through a direct application, rather than contacting job centres; the opposite of female benefit claimants (Gregg and Wadsworth, 1996). As regards job search through newspaper advertisement, this method was correlated with highly skilled and educated people and it was less often used by migrants, since it presupposed the substantial knowledge of the language and familiarity with the institutional norms and formal job search process (Boheim and Taylor, 2001).

In the field of Economic Sociology of Immigration, much research has emphasized the salience of migrant social capital for finding employment (Waldinger, 1994; 1997; Iskander *et al.*, 2012). Immigrants' ties with other fellow nationals tend to circulate information on job opportunities in local labour markets (Sassen, 1995). Finding a job is usually accomplished with the use of information provided by network members; information is circulated "*more quickly than non-network job-seeking methods*" (Livingston, 2006, p.46) Thus, informal job search enables migrant job seekers to access information with low cost. In this sense, for those who lack resources, such as human or financial capital, it is more likely to ask for assistance from their networks in order to find a job. From the other side, the possibility to find a job depends also on the "supply side", that is his informal network; how eager the members of his network are to provide reliable advices; what the relevance of the specific information is; how big or small the network is.

Previous research on how members of ethnic minorities achieve to find employment has highlighted the importance of network-based hiring (Waldinger, 1994). This author put also emphasis on how members of specific ethnic groups tend to concentrate in particular economic

activities, underlying the influence of network and each country's structural characteristics on market economy. In this way, network members tend to be occupied in the same economic sector in which migrants with more years since migration are employed in the most attractive positions. On the other hand, recent surveys have proved that migrant networks might not be of extreme relevance during the job search process (Menjivar, 1997). This scholar proposes that network members might not have to offer much to other members in terms of economic benefits; especially during economic recession periods.

Job search and migrants in the Italian and Greek labour market

As introduced in Chapter 1, quota system has been the formal mechanism for regulating labour migration in Italy. Employers interested in recruiting non-EU nationals had to apply for a specific authorisation for the workers they needed. However, before the first immigration law was enacted, it was the Catholic Church that had a significant role in recruiting the first migrant women, as it has been the mediator between the first female migrant domestic workers and Italian employers (Andall, 2000).

Since 1990s, employers have used both formal and informal channels to recruit migrant workforce. Employment centres, temporary work agencies or newspaper advertisements constituted formal channels through which companies recruited migrant labour force, though social networks have been by far the most frequent practice used by employers to hire immigrants in the Italian labour market (Allasino *et al.*, 2004; Ambrosini, 2008a; Decimo and Sciortino, 2006). Reyneri (2007) also argued that the majority of small-scale firms and households were used to employ those immigrants who already knew, or after having received information and recommendations through personal networks; family or friends' ties.

Concerning the formal channels of job search, the role of temporary work agencies as intermediaries in recruiting migrant workers in Italy has not been analysed sufficiently. Labour market intermediaries are actors, mechanisms or institutions that mediate between the demand side (employers) and workers in search of a job (Fudge and Strauss, 2013). Their existence coincides with the existence of labour markets (Strauss, 2013), and their role has been considered important in diminishing imperfections in information circulation among labour market actors.

With regard to the role of informal intermediaries in the Italian case, it has been argued that intermediary social actors have usually enabled (irregular) migrant settlement and insertion in the host society (Ambrosini, 2017). The author refers to various types of intermediaries who carry out a wide range of activities. For this dissertation, it would be relevant to refer, on the one hand, to "co-ethnic brokers" who may match the demand and supply of labour and find accommodation

to migrants and help them for issues related to their migrants status; on the other hand, native or co-ethnic employers who offer job opportunities and assist migrants' regularization.

Studies on labour market transformation have provided evidences of the rise of “precarious work” that includes part-time work and self-employment, temporary work, contract work, on-call and home-based work, even in construction industry. These types of poorly paid, non-standard and insecure jobs, offering few welfare benefits and characterised by the absence of collective representation, have been promoted by labour intermediaries, the so-called Temporary Employment Agencies (TEAs, also called temporary staffing agencies) (Vosko, 2000).

Since the early 1990s, temporary work through private agencies has been an important component of the Italian labour market (Barbieri and Sestito, 2008). However, one peculiarity about the Italian labour intermediary agencies that provided temporary workforce is that big cooperatives, that have been transformed into Joint stock companies, had a key role in providing such services (Sacchetto and Semenzin, 2016). For instance, sociological evidence come from metalworking firms that addressed to private employment agencies or big cooperatives to find workers (Luciano *et al.*, 2007). The authors pointed out the importance of labour agencies when the employer offers a job that requires repetitive tasks, not special skills and little time for the formation of the worker. Even if employers, at times, ask from labour agencies to send the same workers who have already worked in their company, turnover does not seem to be a barrier for productivity, since the worker can be immediately productive.

Another research has revealed the role of labour agencies in mediating between hotels and restaurants and migrant workers in touristic areas, such as in the Rimini province (Iannuzzi and Sacchetto, 2015). The seasonal and temporary nature of the jobs pushes employers to search workforce through private employment agencies, that can be also based abroad. These agencies may either “post” the workers to Italy with contracts from the state of origin (e.g. Romania), or mediate between employer and employees. Either case, a negative function has been usually attributed to the agencies, because it has been showed how they favour the prevalence of bad working conditions in place where migrants are employed (Gambino and Sacchetto, 2007; Pijpers, 2010; Andrijasevic and Sacchetto, 2017). Finally, Sacchetto and Vianello (2013) have recently underlined the increasing importance that labour agencies and cooperatives have for migrants during the economic crisis. After having remained unemployed, migrant job-seekers may address to agencies, as an alternative way of finding employment.

Within the Greek context²⁵, immigrants' informal social networks have played an important role in searching job and finding accommodation; many times, these webs had the form of ethnic

²⁵ The Greek legislator distinguishes between Temporary Employment Firms (EPA – Law 2956 of 2001), that “*are obliged to be in a contractual relationship with the worker and to ‘lease’ the worker to an end-*

networks (Lazaridis and Koumandraki, 2003). Especially, migrant labourers from Albania, who possessed scarce financial capital at the beginning of their migratory experience, have used their family and strong ties to find employment in Greece. Relying initially on kinship and friends, Albanians achieved to access the Greek labour market and find job in low-skilled sectors.

The great importance of acquaintances when seeking for a job is highlighted in Labrianidis and colleagues (2001) and Iosifides et al. (2007). These authors shed light on immigrants' incorporation in a local labour market in Thessaloniki, and showed how the great majority of Albanians found employment through information on local job opportunities (Sassen, 1995) received by their friends and kinship. Further, immigrants, more than native people, seemed quite eager to move far away from their residence in order to find a new job, not because it was worth only in terms of financial retribution; rather, it had to do with where their contacts were located; it constituted a tactic to overcome barriers imposed by the local labour market. Hence, due to the demand for seasonal workforce, for instance, many workers were used to move from one region to another to work in agriculture fields.

Other significant contributions showed how immigrants might make use of urban spaces in order to find employment (see for instance Iosifides and King, 1998; Psimmenos, 1998; Psimmenos and Georgoulas, 2001). These points have been utilised by immigrants in a very different way than native people did, since migrants have turned them from "dead" places to socially active ones (Psimmenos, 1998). In particular, migrants have sought employment through street labouring markets, where people congregated to find a potential employer. These places could be squares, street corners, cafés; points of job-seekers.

Concerning job searching through labour agencies, it is important to note that it represents an under-researched question in Greece. This channel seems to emerge only during the last 25 years after the arrival of undocumented and exploitable migrant workforce (Maroukis, 2016). According to this author, the dominant role of familistic networks in searching job left little room to labour agencies that have not used as a channel through which unemployed or people with low financial and human capital might find job opportunities. Labour intermediaries' limited role is also explained by the fact that private companies usually rely on informal channels to recruit personnel (Voudouris 2004; Anagnostopoulos and Seibert, 2012), and that the public employment

user employer for a certain period of time" (Maroukis, 2016, p.4), and Temporary Employment Agencies (TEA) that do not have to make contracts with workers they lease to end-user employers. EPA have been active in the banking sector (for native people) and in commercial cleaning and public transport (Kouzis et al., 2009). On the other hand, Maroukis (2016) argues that TEA make the intermediation between low-skilled migrant labour and small and medium-sized Greek hospitality businesses and businesses in the entertainment and sex industries and criminal networks. There is barely any evidence of labour agencies' involvement in the construction sector.

office has significant role (OAED) to find jobs for unemployed people. During 2009 and 2010, the percentage of temporary agency workers was 0.1% of the national workforce (Voss *et al.*, 2013).

Recruitment practices in the Italian and Greek construction sector

Construction is a labour intensive industry in which foreign labourers have found easily employment. Construction sector's products cannot be relocated (Terry, 1999), and, thus, companies cannot move the production procedure to lower costs; rather, they focus on local or regional labour markets (Balch *et al.*, 2004). Apart from informal hiring of migrant labour, European construction companies opted for a variety of strategies to recruit migrant workforce such as through labour agencies or by employing posted workers (Janssen, 2007; Cremers, 2010).

Construction companies in Italy have been traditionally based on social networks when hiring migrant builders (Balch *et al.*, 2004). These authors highlighted the channels that Italian construction companies used to hire personnel in 1990s and early 2000s. They noticed that workforce came from non-EU countries and usually was without proper documents. Hence, irregular migrants - already present in Italy - could be employed in the construction industry only undeclared and uninsured. As a result, network-related practices of recruitment were of great importance for small and medium companies, which faced competition by resorting to undocumented migrants. As already presented in Chapter 2, due to the complexity of the quota system on immigrants inflows, employers' efforts to contact and recruit migrant labourers through formal procedures in the North of Italy (quota system) have usually failed. It is worth noting that networked recruitment was a hallmark of Italian construction industry, and it was based on principles of reciprocity and control between foremen and workers (Paci, 1973).

Apart from companies' strategies to be competitive by hiring undocumented migrants, and the complexity of bureaucratic procedures to issue work permits, the importance of social networks is also due to the family traditions that characterised the management of many firms (Balch *et al.*, 2004). Being accustomed to recruit personnel by addressing to friends, kinship and acquaintances, that is through the 'word of mouth', Italian employers have always considered indispensable the functioning of informal networks, that also demonstrates the short-term perspective of their economic activity.

Networked recruitment has been sometimes connected to gangmasters' (caporali) action. In this respect, there have been evidences that small-scale firms have executed short-term contracts or made verbal agreement by the day with workers (Allasino *et al.*, 2004) recruited by gangmasters. The latter are illegal intermediaries: they have been those actors who picked up workers waiting

in specific districts and took them straight to the workplace, making profit out of them. Gangmasters' action has been favoured by the widespread system of subcontracting of production. Big companies usually subcontract part of the operations to smaller firms, which often employ undocumented workers, in some cases exploited by gangmasters because of their vulnerable immigrant status (Berizzi, 2008).

With respect to the recruiting methods in Greek construction, Labropoulou (2009) and Staveris (2003) have showed the importance of informal networks in finding employment. Recommendations from ex employers and among colleagues has constituted the passport for Greek building workers to access building sites in Athens and other Greek cities. Reciprocity and collective work ethics have underlain informal networks with regard to networked recruitment and new recruits' training.

From the late 1980s onwards, migrants have substituted big part of Greek workforce in construction, and they have usually followed the pathways that native builders used to find employment. Informal social networks have played an important role in providing information for job opportunities in the construction sector where the majority of male Albanians were employed (Psimennos, 2003; Maroukis, 2009).

What is also of high relevance for big cities like Athens is the existence of urban spaces, such as squares or street corners, where builders used to stand by in the early morning hours to find job opportunities. Cafés, central streets and squares of Athens were called 'piatses' (from the Italian piazza=square), and have constituted spaces of socialization and social organisation for builders. 'Piatses' have been those places where information circulated among construction workers and potential employers. Referring to Greek builders' practices in 1960s, Staveris (2003) mentions that there has been a kind of segmentation for different spaces of agglomeration for construction workers, that means that each specialization was used to have a different point of concentration; builders waiting in the square A, painters in the square B, carpenters in the square C. In this way, these spaces have become places of exchange of information and communication. As I analyse below though, such places have also been used by all Albanian immigrants as spaces of socialization, independently from their profession (Iosifides, et al. 2007).

3.3. Findings

3.3.1 Albanian builders and informal channels of job searching

Finding job through social networks

As introduced before, social networks have played a significant role in assisting migrants to find job opportunities, in the sense that immigrants tend to share information within a common network. Shedding light on the origins and applications of social capital in modern society, Portes (1998) explained how information may be circulated within network members. Based on the norm of reciprocity, individuals with similar experiences provide information on labour market job opportunities, expecting that such action will be repaid in the same manners by other network members.

Another interesting feature is that network members do not only transmit information on job opportunities, but rather they may act as referrals for other network members, that is they may influence decision-making of potential employers or intermediaries (Lin, 2001). Family and friends also may serve as references for other migrants, vouching for skills of the latter, character and work ethic (Garcia, 2005). In this sense, Garcia (2005) points out that it is crucial for network members to serve as referrals for those who deserve it, otherwise the very referrals will be the ones who suffer from prospective workers' incompetence and maladjustment where teamwork is essential. This is very relevant for building trades, since teamwork is necessary in building sites.

Research on Albanian male migrants' insertion into the Greek and Italian labour market has stressed the importance of migrants' network in finding job (see for instance Kotic and Triandafyllidou; 2003; Iosifides *et al.*, 2007). In Greece, Iosifides and colleagues (2007) have distinguished various forms of Albanians' social capital. Bonding social capital, that is family and kinship ties, has played a central role in Albanians' incorporation in the labour market, whereas bridging social capital seemed to be extremely low for the vast majority of immigrants and had little importance when getting a job in the 1990s and 2000s. Similar evidences have also emerged by Kotic and Triandafyllidou (2003) as regards the importance of family networks in Albanians' settlement and insertion in the Italian labour market.

With respect to the Italian construction industry, Perrotta (2011) has argued that informal networks constituted a significant resource for Romanian builders. For the Greek construction sector, in particular, Iosifides and colleagues (2007) have argued that the construction sector in Athens shared characteristics of an enclave economy (Waldinger, 1996) for Albanians due to the widespread reliance on bonding social capital when getting a job. As a result, Albanians were often entrapped in the construction industry, and were denied opportunities in other economic sectors. However, other scholars do not share this view stating that construction has never had the

characteristics of an ethnic economy, since the majority of contractors were Greeks (Maroukis, 2013).

Research on migrant labour in British and French construction has shown the importance of community networks in recruiting labour (Jounin, 2008; Thiel, 2010). Thiel (2010) has argued that informal networks are central factors to comprehending how builders get jobs, whereas network relationships are influenced by immigrants' experiences, ethnicities, class and gender. In this sense, he restated what Granovetter (1974, 1985) had supported on patterning of employment networks and that economic relations are embedded in "*community and family lives and their ensuing forms of culture, status and identity*" (Thiel, 2014, p.88). On this aspect, a recent contribution on migrant builders in the Dutch construction industry reveals that informal networks not only provide information on job opportunities, but constitute a source for "*ensuring acceptable and well-paid employment*" (Berntsen, 2016, p.482).

According to Bourdieu (1986, p.52), creating social ties (networking) is the outcome of a laborious activity (*effort*) "*in order to produce and reproduce lasting, useful relationships that can secure material or symbolic profits*". For all my participants working in the construction industry, networking was an indispensable source of information on jobs. The first and spontaneous reply to the question on how they usually find job was "*through the 'word of mouth'*"; "*through friends and kinship*". Both in Italy and Greece Albanians usually rely on their networks to search employment. They share information and usually serve as reference for other members of their network; familiar or friends. This is an idea echoed by one participant in Milan who usually serve as reference for other fellow nationals. According to his sayings, it is a reciprocal practice followed by all people of the network:

We serve as references one to another to find employment. We all do like this. We are good workers, we aren't afraid of working hard [...] if I take up a new building site, I call my relatives or my friends. (Albion, aged 51, Milan)

Albion stated that the most successful way to find employment is through his relatives and friends. As argued in Chapter 1, these social ties are bonding and horizontal (Ryan *et al.*, 2008), that is resources are provided by people from the same national group and social class. However, such resources may not be efficient in times of crisis, when construction activity is too low. Referrals among compatriots are less significant, when the economic situation is stagnant. Luftar is a 45-year-old mason with two children. He has always worked for an Italian employer, and remained with a limited circle of conationals. He was unemployed for almost two years, and, during the period of unemployment, he worked occasionally for some friends of him as builder, or in cleaning services. In this way, he had a small income. He was hired again as builder after his ex-

employer called him. Now, he is employed with a fixed-term contract, hoping that his employer continue to take up new works, and offer him a new contract. In his words:

As I said you before, if you don't have references or friends, it's always difficult. I was still for almost two years... You seek to get by going to do some nixer. You have to ask always if there is some nixer to do [...] I worked with my brother-in-law and two other friends for an Italian employer. You have been working together more than 10 years. [...] first, (my employer) called my brother-in-law. Then, I was called too. [...] last year I had a three-month contract until January, and when my employer took up a new work, he has extended it and offered me an open-ended contract. But, as I told you, I hope it (the working activity) lasts... because the contract is not worth so much... if the employer says "I'm forced to close" that's enough (I become unemployed once again) (Luftar, aged 45, Milan)

As the above quote indicates, Luftar continues to find work through his informal networks. However, since his employer fired him during the crisis, he did not achieve to find stable employment, rather than some occasional works. His bonding social capital limited his opportunities to get a new job, and he has been offered a new contract in a quite casual and passive way; when his ex-employer rang him. This response is unwitting and, as such, it cannot be characterized as agency. The same goes for the possibility to become unemployed once again. If his employer cannot achieve to undertake new works, he will be laid-off. Rather assuming that such use of social capital constitutes a source of agency for migrant builders (Berntsen, 2016), I consider that such practices to find a job do not entail any kind of strategic features. In the case of carrying out occasional works, Luftar's accumulated social capital is utilized in a sporadic, not continuous, tactical way. He insists in searching for occasional works. On the other hand, being called after two years of unemployment can be characterised as a survival response, since it does not presuppose any active practice. Luftar has been an *entrapped* social actor, because of the exclusive use of his bonding networks to find a job. He escaped from such a situation in a rather casual way, and, in the same way, he may remain unemployed and lapse into entrapment at any moment.

Similarly, informal networks can be used as source of solidarity, in the sense that migrant builders may devise tactics of self-provisioning (Smith and Stenning, 2006; Datta *et al.*, 2007). Datta and colleagues (2007, p.418) identified cases of African migrant women in London who created micro-credit schemes, contributing money to a fund to "*help each other out at times of need*". In my case studies, I encountered one example of such solidarity mechanism among Albanian workers employed in the same company and remained unemployed during the recession period.

[...] we helped one another, because we were 17 Albanians in that company... not conationals, but I can say we were like brothers ... we went out together, we played football together [...] We did a sort of a “whip-round”... one friend of ours who was separated from his wife, and had also a daughter, he lost his job. One might put 20 euro, one might put 50 euro... Then, whoever heard about a new work tried to make work the one who needed it more. (Liridon, aged 41, Milan)

Apart from helping financially each other, it has been more common that Albanian workers exchange information on vacancies and get jobs to those in greater need. In addition, such practices of solidarity did not generate only financial help, but may also include emotional support. In any case, these responses to few job opportunities are far from being characterized as strategies. When such practice has the characteristics of a preventive action (e.g. a group of migrants who take up initiative to create a “protection net”, in case that one of them lose his job) may be characterised as *tactical*. On the other hand, when these practices concern recipients of help (economic or emotional) who depend on others’ willingness during unemployment periods, it is a survival practice that aims to cover basic needs.

As introduced before, many researchers have highlighted the role of the ethnicity in transmitting information and resources among immigrants in the destination country (Waldinger, 1996). Ethnic-specific networks share resources, mainly in the first stages of settlements. However, long-time residents of the Albanian community in Milan and Athens seem to have expanded their social networks to an extent that they do not rely exclusively on their ethnic networks. After many years in the host society, Albanians may consider that recourse to social ties is restrictive. Having set up links and networks with native people, well-integrated Albanians may find job opportunities through information and resources that circulate beyond bonding social ties.

The work I got doesn’t have to do with the Albanian community. I know you, you know me, it appears any work, I employ you. It comes from your social circle. (Getoar, aged 40, Milan)

~

I have only once worked with a compatriot. My employers have been always Greeks. (Armend, aged 43, Athens)

Getoar and Armend are two examples of well-integrated Albanians who have developed social ties with native people. That contrasts with other migrant populations’ practices, such as Moroccans in Veneto interviewed by Sacchetto (2013), who do not usually frequently Italian citizens. Here, rather than being forced to rely exclusively on ethnic networks to find job within the Italian and Greek construction sector, migrant may create new ties. For Getoar and Armend,

it seems that their capacity to contact native people depends on individual characteristics and their immigration trajectory. Getoar has a child with an Italian woman, and he admitted that frequenting native people give him the opportunity to have more options when searching a job. Armend was married with a Greek woman, and he has created many social ties with Greek people. Research has shown that mixed marriages have been largely used as strategic option to acquire stay permit and citizenship rights in Italy (EMN, 2012). In this case, though, marriage with natives cannot be characterised as strategy, since such an action would involve a plan and predefined goals, in the sense that these migrants decided to marry native women to expand their social circle. At the time of the interviews, both participants unveiled me that they were separated from their partners. In such cases, marriages and relationships with native women cannot be characterized as strategies, but eventualities that have enabled the expansion of social ties and the accumulation of cultural capital. If the opposite was true, both participants would not break up their relationships that it might implicate weakness of their capital.

The work of Moroşanu (2016) also has sparked interest about how migrants may access better jobs using weak bridging ties with native people. Examining Romanians' insertion in the labour market of London, she illustrates that British friends have acted as "cultural brokers" by sharing information for future employers to Romanian migrants. Another strategy employed was Romanians' immersion in professional environments that permitted them to convert their social capital into cultural; mainly improving language and communication skills.

In the case of Albanian construction workers, the conversion of their social capital into cultural capital usually concerns language competence and interaction skills. In turn, this cultural capital is converted into bridging social capital, generating new job opportunities. Edon and Milot, who mainly frequented Italian and Greek colleagues in the building sites respectively, have acquired proficiency in Italian and Greek respectively. These skills enabled them not only to access information for job opportunities from native workers and other friends, but also to create contacts with prospective clients. Albanian migrants whose fluency increased their self-confidence have been in a position to interact better with native clients. Entering native people's housing through their employers, they used to give a contact number after a finished work. In this way, they have created a network of clients and may work for them in the future as off-the-books own-account workers (Chapter 4). They have multiplied the possibility to have an extra income during the recession period.

[...] usually during the weekends... I work "in black", both for other craftsmen or for myself. Thanks to other works I made in the past, I left my phone number to people who now call me to have their house painted. (Edon, aged 40, Milan)

~

I always had Greek colleagues who helped me to find jobs. We call each other and speak about works. [...] I don't like to be always with Albanians at work. I made friendships with everyone, independently (whether they were Albanians or not). [...] when I went to work at people's homes, many times, I had a chat with the owner and I left my phone number. (Milot, aged 41, Athens)

On the other hand, immigrants who have always used bonding or strong ties to find employment may now be excluded from the labour market. As Portes (1998) notes, maintaining strong ties entails the risk of social marginalization. Disadvantaged populations who rely mainly on strong ties may not have the same opportunities as those who keep maintaining weak ties (Granovetter, 1983, p.213); or, even worse, they can be found in ghetto situations (Wierzbicki, 2004).

In this respect, Valbon and Fatlum, two Albanian citizens in Athens, verify the constraining nature of bonding strong ties, commenting the situation in a central square of Athens. They criticize their compatriots who are unemployed due to their detachment from the Greek society. In this respect, Kosic and Triandafyllidou (2003) have argued that poor language skills do not permit migrants to access skilled employments, and it lead them to stay in unskilled jobs. Lack of competences in Greek language and limited engagement with the Greek society may create enclaves that limit Albanian builders' job opportunities. Fatlum has increased his cultural capital by following Greek languages courses after he finished the working day. The exact opposite may be true in the sense that those who keep relying exclusively to their ethnic network and do not sustain any social relations with native people have less job opportunities (Iosifides *et al.*, 2007). Fatlum is also a good example of how Albanians may derive benefits from their cultural capital converted into social capital. He worked for years as small-scale subcontractor and, in the last years, even if he opted to run a cleaning service business, he continues to carry out works in residential construction. His experience also suggests how social (occupational) mobility may function a springboard for social ties (Granovetter, 1983). Thanks to the acquaintances through his new job, he expanded his weak ties, since he interacts everyday with many people. These ties have provided possibilities of finding new clients as off-the-books own-account-worker (Chapter 4). Indispensable condition for achieving so is the widespread informal work in Greek construction that enables him to continue to work as a small-scale subcontractor. The same it can be assumed for the Italian sector, as Edon's example illustrated above.

They stand on the square and they don't want to work. They don't speak even Greek... many of them... because they have always worked with Albanians. Go to the square and have a look. They are all there to play tavli (table game) and cards. (Valbon, aged 56, Athens).

~

In the morning, I worked in the building sites, but, in the evening, I went to school from 4 to 10. It was a program for foreigners to learn Greek. [...] If you stay there (square) to play domino all the day, and if you cannot understand what a Greek guy tells you, how to find a job? Am I a sucker that I spent so many hours to learn Greek? And I have always tried to be with Greeks, and I was making questions, when I didn't understand what they told me. If you don't strive, you'll not have success. (Fatlum, aged 35, Athens)

Fatlum is a *dynamic*, active social actor. He possesses a ten-year (indefinitely renewable) stay permit and has excellent linguistic competences. His proficiency in Greece enables flows of information on building works. He is a strategic actor, since he has been able to maintain his informal network during the years of recession and reactivate them when the “*economic situation improved*”. As I argue in Chapter 5, during the years of stagnancy, he started up a new firm in cleaning services and widened his weak bridging ties that he now uses to find new employments in construction. He knows how to navigate the market and objectify social environment. He maintains his decisional autonomy, since he can create opportunities when economic activity in construction is low.

Another dimension that seem to affect the durability of builders' social capital has to do with the specialization within construction. Recession hit particular hard all trades connected with the initial phases of constructions. Carpenters, ironworkers and bricklayers are the trades most affected by the economic recession due to the decline of new building construction. However, the majority of Albanian builders had been clustered in these trades, because they usually lacked the skills and formal qualifications to carry out other skilled trades in the construction sector, such as the mechanical and electrical tradesmen (Thiel, 2010). Hence, it can be assumed that social networks of migrant workers who remained entrapped into these trades, and did not acquire new qualifications have not be able to share information and get jobs in residential construction. On this issue, it is useful to recall Iskander and colleagues' work (2010) on Mexican migrant builders in the USA. These authors have argued the migrants who were able to be employed in a continuous way were those who possess a variety of skills. Acquiring new skills enabled them to increase their employability and secure their jobs.

Tarek is a builder and he followed seminars on thermal insulation. Now, he has acquired new skills and developed further trustful relations with both Albanian and Greek contractors and workers. After working as a bricklayer for many years, Tarek felt it was time to strike out on his own and acquired new craft skills. He not only achieved to maintain his social network, but also to expand it during the economic recession. Further, he has not been conditioned by his trade identity as bricklayer, he acquired new educational (craft) qualifications and escaped from his

limiting ethnic network (Thiel, 2010). The same is true for other participants who opted to acquire professional qualifications, to diversify their trade, and be more “sealable” in a period in which some trades have been favoured; both due to the demand for conducting renovations and repairs in old buildings; or, the promotion of policies for buildings’ energy performance through EU directives that usually entail economic incentives for the users. In Milan too, builders have the opportunity to reskill through seminars and training organised by the Milan School of Construction.

ID: how did you learn to do thermal insulation?

T: I went to a seminar through a company (building supplies)... I learnt how to do it and I also took a paper (certificate). Now, I can demonstrate to the owner or to the engineer that I know to do this.

ID: I see. Would you like to tell me how it occurred to you to follow this seminar?

T: You see... I thought out of need, because as a builder, as bricklayer I couldn't work anymore. People don't construct anymore. And, then, they made a law and gave money (subsidies) to those who put those materials in their houses. [...] So, I thought to change my trade. But, I keep working as a builder when happens.

ID: who are the people you collaborate with?

T: I work with my ex contractors both Albanians and Greeks, but I have also created new clients, through the word of mouth. (Tarek, aged 42, Athens)

~

Now I'm following a plasterboard adhesive training. It's always useful to know how to make it. It happens a work for which I have to put plasterboard. (Shpend, aged 46, Milan)

In response to stagnation of their specialization, Tariq and Shpend opted to reskill through training programmes in order to increase their employability. Formal apprentice and training was an opportunity to secure their employment shifting from specialization into another. Even if the great majority of my sample had learned the trade on the job, and acquired skills over time, it seems that well-informed migrants may follow formal education in order to secure consistent employment. In the Greek case, since information was provided by building materials shops, it can be assumed that migrants with propensity for own-account work have more possibility to be informed about such programmes. Information provided by such professionals enabled migrant own-account workers to access training certification. Tariq and Shpend followed courses to increase knowledge on installing new building materials. They are active social actors who are able to perceive the changes in the labour market, prefigure labour market demand and pursue their goals. In this sense, such a response can be characterized as a strategy, since these well-informed actors have been able to rationally calculate (market) force relationships and shift trade.

In addition, both actors are characterised by a *dynamism* allowing them to navigate the market and escaping building sector's stagnation; new skills and stable employment are causally linked.

In contrast, socialization with fellow national mates specialized in penalized trades (in the first stages of construction activity) has constrained Albanian builders' capacity to mobilise resources. In this respect, it has been also argued that internal "ethnic networks" (for instance, in the study of Thiel, 2012a: a group of migrant carpenters) may limit opportunities of the agents (Portes and Landolt, 1996) and reinforce their stratification positions. Among my participants, there have been examples of people whose strong ties with their colleagues of the same trade constituted barriers for finding new job opportunities, and displaced them from the construction sector. Alban worked as carpenter for almost ten years. His network functioned as a "social mobility trap" (Thiel, 2010, p.457), since he relied only on other carpenters to find job.

A: I have never changed job. I was a carpenter. I didn't know to do any other profession. We were all carpenters, we have always worked together. [...] after the crisis, we tried to help each other, but there was no work. I decided to go back (return to Albania).

ID: Does it bother you when you don't work as a carpenter?

A: Yes, yes it bothered me. I couldn't do it at the beginning. Now, I've found this job (repair of railway lines) and the situation is more balanced. I couldn't do other job, I was used to work in a different way. It's different when you work in the building site. Just think that it was a problem when we had to work for different contractors! (Alban, aged 35, Athens)

Tight networks with co-ethnics or mates of the same trade may constrain social mobility, as in Alban's case. New job opportunities are also limited for those attached to a strong work identity. Doing a different trade than the one in which Alban is specialized induces psychological distress and disappointment. Affirmations such as "*I am a carpenter*" and "*I didn't know to do any other profession*" reflect how a strong work identity may constrain opportunities both inside and outside the construction sector. It might be even more relevant for Albanian builders in Athens whose employment had acquired a communal character and constituted a form of resistance against the informalization of work (Psimmenos, 2003). In this respect, Maroukis (2009) has underlined that the building site has been for many Albanian males a space of socialization that they might not abandon, even if they were not be satisfied with working conditions and payments. The workplace has been a space where Albanian retrieved their dignity and recreated their identity. Their work identity gave them a social prestige, and they could not easily decide to escape from this context and their networks, although the limitations of their choice. Both from the previous quote of Alban and from Valon's words below, it might be confirmed that Albanians' social networks are

ascribed and contingent (Thiel, 2010). Past contacts and social standing may affect future trajectories of migrant builders (Bottero, 2005). Albanian who rely on exclusively on horizontal bonding ties may “*believe themselves to be without alternatives*”. Insecure individuals so *entrapped* may “*lose some of the advantages associated with the outreach of weak ties*” (Granovetter, 1983, p.213).

There are no jobs. I asked all the people around. There's nothing to do! Nobody of my acquaintance work anymore. [...] I'm a carpenter, I'm not a painter. Yes, if you call me, I can paint your house, but I cannot do it professionally. (Valon, aged 44, Athens)

Strong ties with groups of co-ethnics or occupational identities may not only limit Albanian workers' opportunities, but low efficiency in network members to circulate information on job opportunities is also related to social class. Bottero (2005) argues that information flowing through horizontal bonding ties might not be useful; it seems to be all the more true for those with no formal qualifications. In this respect, Thiel (2007) points out that builders in the UK have not always been able to find adequate responses to continue working in times of social changes. He underlines that it is more relevant for older builders without capacity to adapt, since they lack formal qualifications.

I have asked many people. But, most of them, my acquaintances, my circle (network) are (dependent) workers like me. Unemployment rammed also them, like me. (Valon, aged 44, Athens)

Durability of social capital for Albanian builders may be also conditioned by structural characteristics such as informality (Chapter 4), and individual characteristics such as the propensity to self-employment. The prevalence of informal economic patterns seem to favour those who had a propensity to self-employment, since almost all of my respondents who declared that they have been unemployed for many months, and continued to fail to find job through their social networks, were people that have never thought of working as self-employed. In contrast, many of those who have worked as autonomous workers in the past, even as off-the-books, have achieved to maintain their social network, and, even if remained unemployed for some periods, they have maintained their social ties through which they receive information on job opportunities. This assumption might confirm what Thiel (2007, p.243) sustains for autonomous self-governing individuals who may have more life and career choices, because they possess formal qualifications. In my case, Albanians' autonomy and self-confidence are built upon their bridging social capital and their language and communication skills.

Finally, women's employment seems to have a significant impact on maintaining social capital by Albanian males in both cities. Women's employment enabled the continuation of the migration experience, since many males had to stay at home unemployed for many months. "If there weren't my wife's job, we had returned to Albania" was a phrase that I heard by many respondents. In the case in which women sustained the household, Albanian builders might not take the decision to leave the destination country, and they waited until the situation in construction got better. Changing breadwinner role is thoroughly analysed in Chapter 5. However, this was an wait-and-see response to few employment opportunities.

All in all, although many of my respondents accomplished to maintain their social ties and continue to work in residential construction, it is true that even well-established networks may be of no relevance in searching job in times of economic recession (Menjivar, 2000). Many of Albanian workers with high social and cultural capital could not achieve to find work through their informal networks in both countries. Construction activity has dramatically decreased, and many Albanians had no information to exchange on job opportunities. These individuals might have secured steady employment through other channels, as presented in the paragraphs below.

Illicit employment through brokers in the construction sector of Milan

In this section, I shall focus on a special type of informal networks that encompass illicit economic practices. It is the case of illicit hiring of migrant workers through intermediaries. Here, the analysis is based on my respondents' representations of this phenomenon, and on one interview with an Italian builder who has been acting as illicit intermediary for construction labourers in Milan. This section concerns exclusively the Italian case study, because no reference for such a phenomenon has been made in the literature about the functioning of the Greek construction sector; nor have I collected such evidences. Although the lack of much data, I introduce a typology of informal brokers, that can be utilized as a basis for further research.

As already introduced, there has been a growing interest in the role of migrants' informal networks in migration studies (Massey *et al.*, 1986). Migrants' ties within ethnic community networks, in particular, may be of great importance for migrants' settlement in the country of destination, and insertion in its labour market (Portes, 2010; Ambrosini, 2017). However, exchange of information about labour market opportunities, or intermediation between employers and migrants sometimes occur with monetary exchange. In this sense, it has been emphasized the

role of another social actor that has an important contribution to migrants' arrival in the country of destination and their insertion in the labour market, the so-called "broker". According to Goss and Lindquist (1995), brokers are usually intermediaries who assist migrants' settlement in receiving countries by establishing ties between prospective migrants and labour market in the receiving countries. These agents offer illegal services to their co-nationals in exchange of money (Alpes, 2013). In other words, these mediating individuals may command resources connected with migrants' needs in the host country, and they are able to distribute these resources at a certain price (usually monetary).

Over the last two decades, the European media have frequently reported cases of exploited migrants who have been recruited through gangmasters. Although this phenomenon has largely concerned agriculture workers (see for instance in Italy: Leogrande, 2008; Botte, 2009; Pugliese, 2012; Azzeruoli and Perrotta, 2015; in the UK: Anderson and Rogaly, 2005; in Greece: Triandafyllidou and Maroukis, 2012), or fruit package industry (see for instance in the UK: Balch and Scott, 2011), there have been evidences that illegal intermediaries may act within the construction industry as well (Anderson and Rogaly, 2005; Cillo and Perocco, 2008; Cremers, 2010).

With regards to migrants' insertion in the Italian labour market, the phenomenon of the illegal hiring system with the intermediation of gangmasters is called *caporalato*; the intermediaries *caporali*. According to Perrotta and Sacchetto (2014), gangmasters have been presented for many decades throughout the country, organizing the work in agriculture and construction. During the 1990s, although the figure of the Italian gangmaster has never disappeared, those have been gradually replaced by migrant gangmasters who have intermediated between migrants and natives in order to match labour demand and supply. Despite the negative representations of brokers by the media and trade unions, this figure has not always been seen as a "slave driver" or violent by immigrants, rather as an intermediary in which migrants have confidence (Azzeruoli and Perrotta, 2015).

In construction, gangmastery has been favoured by the long chains of labour subcontracting, as brokers may become "the go-between" the migrant worker and his employer. In other words, such a phenomenon is usually observed when large companies subcontract work to small-scale subcontractors who, in their turn, may subcontract labour to other subcontractors who may recourse to intermediaries in order to find workforce (Cremers, 2009). This strategy of labour-only subcontracting usually permits the entrance of informal workforce in the market. In the lowest chains of production, migrant (or native) labourers may be employed through gangmasters who get a cut of their (daily) wages. Illegal recruiters may employ construction workers

on a temporary or daily basis, forcing them usually to work for long hours, and paying them less comparing to the terms of national collective agreements.

Apart from journalistic reports and surveys (Berizzi, 2008), gangmastery in the Italian construction sector has not been studied from a sociological point of view. Academic works on these issues have been descriptive, and have stigmatized the agents who carry out such activities, without shedding light on their networks (Azzeruoli and Perrotta, 2015). For instance, Cillo and Perocco (2008) have highlighted how gangmasters exploited irregular workers, withholding a part of their wage for themselves, and, in other cases, have illustrated the benefits arising from this practice for both the employers and the gangmasters.

Illegal recruiting of migrant workers persists until today, notwithstanding legal provisions to combat this phenomenon (Azzeruoli and Perrotta, 2015). More precisely, it has been introduced the criminalization of illicit brokering with the Legislative Decree no 138/2011 (Art. 12). Illicit intermediation of workforce contravenes the Italian Penal code and offenders may be punished with pecuniary penalties of at least 2000 euro, or even with imprisonment from five to eight years. Having been added as Article 630-bis of the Penal Code, the provision punishes “*cases of exploitation of the work performed each time one considers that the remuneration does not comply with collective agreements, a violation of working hours and sanitary conditions occurs, or it is found that the worker is subjected to degrading working and housing condition*” (Callia et al., 2013). In 2016, this law has been modified by a new one (199/2016) that strengthens punishments in cases of severe exploitation of labourers.

Turning to my case studies, Albanian migrant workers seem not to be usually employed illicitly through *caporali*. However, when it happens, this pattern may regard migrants with low levels of social capital, who do not have other choice than being hired by intermediary agents. The broker can be a self-employed worker (A) who subcontracts labour from another (sub)contractor (B). I call this type of broker *artisan broker (caporale artigiano)*. In this case, the *artisan broker* can offer job to other dependent workers who can be employed by him or by another company inside the building site. The profit that the actor A makes out of dependent workers’ wages is justified by the “service” of intermediation he provided between them and the firm that employs them. In other words, the actor A provided a “reference service” for which he is paid in money; or, if the workers are employed by his own firm, the workers have to repay the “ticket” to access a building site by virtue of himself as a broker.

[...] some friends of mine had to sign a contract for 10 euros per hour, but they received 8 or 9; this tactic was mostly done by craftsmen. Before the crisis, an artisan... did what? He went to work for a firm, he brought other workers [...] and he made profit out of them.
(Liridon, aged 41, Milan)

~

If we (the company) undertake the construction of a ten-store building tomorrow, we cannot do it by ourselves, since we're ten people. We subcontract work to other firms. [...] those workers may take five euro per hour, even if my company gives twelve to them (through the subcontractor or employer). So, my company was absolutely legal. And, you (gang-master/subcontractor) give them 7 euro per hour and 5 euro you put it in your pocket. (Saban, aged 54, Milan).

Within the long chains of subcontracting, migrant workers may perform activities for brokers who can be even their fellow nationals or their employers. For some of my respondents, this trend seems to be growing due to the low demand for construction workforce. Migrants whose social capital has weakened during the economic crisis have not the opportunity to avoid such working arrangements. As a Trade Unionist explains, finding a job through a broker may be considered a valuable source of income during a recession period. Migrants may even consider it as a right option, since the alternative could be to remain unemployed.

The phenomenon of caporalato has been increasing significantly. We talk about people who withhold a percentage of what the workers earn, in case they (brokers) find them a job. It's more frequent within specific communities of immigrant workers; Arab workers or Rumanians. [...] This stuff here has increased a lot with the crisis, despite state laws have strengthened [...] because even if one takes the 30% of his salary, it's still very important; at a time in which there is nothing (no job opportunities); it seems a right choice. (Trade Unionist, 29-5-2015, Milan)

According to this Trade Unionist, brokering may have ethnic characteristics (Bertolani, 2003), and largely concerns specific migrant groups. In this respect, no reference has been made to the Albanian nationality by any institutional actor. From the excerpt above, it is confirmed what Perrotta and Sacchetto (2014) sustained about gangmasters coming from Romania and recruiting Romanian workers for agricultural jobs. These authors state that illicit intermediation does not concern only the match between the demand and the labour side, but brokers may organize every step of migrants' trajectories, that is to organize their entrance in the Italian territory, how to find accommodation, and how to get a job. From the other part, Albanian migration patterns have not usually had such characteristics (Chapter 1). Even if there have been some evidences of smugglers' involvement with regard Albanian migrants' entrance in Italy (Kosic and Triandafyllidou, 2003), Albanian brokers have never been connected to labour intermediation, once the migrants entered Italy. According to Kosic and Triandafyllidou (2003), Albanian migrants might remain for much time without job in Italy, until they found their first employment.

The majority of Albanians found jobs by making use of their bonding social ties (King and Mai, 2004). Thus, it can be assumed that Albanian smugglers rarely act as brokers in the labour market.

Secondly, it has been argued that brokering services have been used by migrants whose language skills were very low (Brooks and Singh, 1979). In a case study on Punjabi Sikh workers in British foundries, the authors stated that the workers themselves sought to be assisted by ethnic brokers, because their level of proficiency in English was very low. As for Albanians in Italy, language could not be a barrier for entrance in the construction industry. The majority of Albanians were able – at least - to understand few Italian words, because they had the possibility to illegally watch Italian television programs in the times of communism (Mai and Schwandner-Sievers, 2003). In addition, it has been shown that language proficiency cannot constitute a barrier for migrants to access building sites, since migrant workers may develop tacit communication practices in multinational construction sites (Tutt *et al.*, 2013).

Last but not least, the majority of Albanians sought to be installed in Italy, and they rarely have short-term migration aspirations. Thus, it might be assumed that they sought to become members of networks of which members could circulate information for job opportunities without monetary exchange. On the contrary, it has been showed that migrants with short-term aspirations of migration tend to search for jobs within short periods of time, and for this reason they have to rely on brokers to find a job as fast as possible (Brooks and Singh, 1979).

Therefore, Albanian builders' engagement in illicit hiring through (not exclusively migrant) brokers may be casual or connected with working arrangements between craftsmen (*artisan brokers*) with more years since migration and workers with low levels of social capital. Immigrant status also might be of relevance here, as reported by many respondents.

Albanian craftsmen have usually exploited us (workers), withholding money from our wages because we were illegal” (Enver, aged 29, Milan)

In any case, relying on intermediary brokers cannot be considered as a strategy. This practice can be either *survival* or *tactical* response from those lacking access to informal networks that can provide free charge information for job opportunities. *Survival* may be for those who use this channel in a continuous way and have no other alternatives, mainly when transactions imply criminal activities or blackmailing. On the other hand, those who opt to use it sporadically in a time of difficulty may be characterised as *tactical*. Migrants relying on such networks seem *entrapped* in exploitative working arrangements.

As introduced above, illicit hiring of migrants is not organized exclusively by immigrants, but also by Italians (Perrotta and Sacchetto, 2014). Citing a long excerpt from the interview with one

Italian broker, I now introduce another type of broker that may act in the Italian construction industry and may concern both migrants and natives: the *mate broker* (*caporale collega*). One of my key respondents is an Italian builder who has acted as broker; working as a dependent worker and brokering at the same time. His representation of gangmastery is that acting as *caporale* does not mean other than matching the demand and supply side. It does not concern only migrant construction workers, but even indigenous ones. He put also emphasis on the fact that illicit recruiting does not regard only undeclared workers, but this mechanism is independent from the existence of formal contract for the worker.

ID: But does this (caporalato) still happen today?

K: Yes, but it's harder to happen upon it. [...] you tell me 'you see, I have a big business and I am not able to find the workers'. "Don't worry, I can bring you the workers" ...workers are all formally hired! But we agree: the workers for the firm cost 7 euros, but he tells to the workers that he can give them 5. [...] I (broker) pay you 5, so it remains 1 euro for me, one euro for the business, and 5 euros for the worker; per hour. However, the workers' contributions and Social fund are regularly paid.

ID: Can this practice be undertaken even by a worker? Or, it regards only craftsmen?

K: It doesn't matter. It's a practice that happens not at once let's say...not at the very beginning ... it's necessary to know each other to do these things.

ID: Does it concern Italians as well?

K: Yes, yes! When you make money there are no flags at all (laughs) (Key Informant, Italian builder, 19-4-2016)

According to the above-cited key informant, any construction worker may act as a *mate broker*. Dependent workers may intermediate when employers opt to have a profit out of working arrangements with construction labourers. It can be considered a practice from which the employers may limit the expenses for labour force. Enforceable trust is required among social actors, due to the illicit nature of this transaction (Portes, 1995). However, it cannot be inferred that illicit hiring does not provide a formal contract, but workers may work declared to the authorities, while their wages are paid cash-in-hand.

In this respect, it would be interesting to lay out this type of gangmaster, taking into account the key features proposed by Perrotta and Sacchetto (2014) for the study of gangmasters. This broker is an agent who put in contact employers with labourers in an occasional way. In other words, the working period of the gangmaster has not seasonal characteristics and it is not repetitive over the time. The relationship between the worker and the *mate broker* are purely economic, and it does not have "community" characteristics. Concerning the reproduction pattern, the *mate broker* does not seem to have any influence on the labourer's life outside the workplace, something that

emerges even vividly from the following excerpt. No conclusion can be drawn for the working pattern of the role of the gangmaster, that is whether it is monopolistic or competitive.

Other studies on the figure of broker have also put much emphasis on some individual characteristics such as nationality and ethnicity (see for instance Brooks and Singh, 1979). Ethnic brokers have vouched for their co-ethnics' skills, productivity and character. Apart from brokers' origin, scholars have also paid attention on intermediaries' position within networks and their capacity to put in contact employers with prospective workers. However, little emphasis has been put on another individual characteristic that seems important for labour intermediation: the age of the broker as an "adhesive material" between different generations.

In this respect, Brooks and Singh (1979, p. 107) argued that "*a broker is more likely to be an older person than a younger one. The reasons for this are twofold: brokers have in many cases been among the earliest members of their ethnic group to start in each plant; and many brokers incorporate the respect given to older people within their role*". However, construction, as an intensive labour industry, usually demands young workers who have the physical strength to execute specific works. In this case, brokers' age has not to do with a need for "respect to the authority", but rather it may serve to bridge the gap between older employers/subcontractors and young workforce. In other words, it is expected that older employers may not have many links with young people due to generation gap. Age mismatch may be addressed by the intermediation of young people (usually *mate brokers*) who possess social ties with both employers and young mates. Employers shall seek to find an intermediary who will be able to supply them with the labour force they need; and, they will pay the broker for that service.

ID: Did you do that practice? Did you have a group of people...

K: Yes I was a part of the gearwheel. When I was younger, I had the chance to meet more young guys who wanted to enter in the world of construction.

ID: Did they ask you if you had some work for them?

K: Yes. But I asked too [...] and then my bosses saw me both as a young guy – I was 24 years old - who was able to bring people of his age. I was saying the "adhesive element". [...] you make absolutely profit out of people's blood.

ID: I ask you so because within one year, I went around Milan, around the squares for which journalists are talking...

K: But I'm talking about my place of residence. It's hard to just see it. It's not like that you come to my town for example, and you see it. If you come to my town for example, I can tell you the bar where the workers meet up. At 5 o'clock, because you start working at 7 o'clock; you have to be there two hours at least in advance... Then, the bartender of the cafe is a bit like a psychologist; it's a bit like a hairdresser; he knows the entire town's

fucking business. Because, I'm telling you, if you go directly, it's hard; you won't see twenty people waiting the van in the morning, and then get on the van. The business probably knows the bartender, then through the bartender... But, if the contractor is a man of 50 years old, and needs 25 year-olds, there's a step missing, because he's 50 years old, even though he might be in touch with some 25 year-olds; it's hard for the 50 year-old man to know you (young guy) or discuss about that stuff.. so, what's happening? He needs a person who introduces him younger people. The person I might first consider about is the barman, isn't it?

So, if you go in the morning to drink a coffee, you talk to the bartender and say 'eh, if you know someone, I have a part (of money), I have a small part for you'. What does the bartender do afterwards? He spread the voice, doesn't he? But, you can find a maximum of 3 people in the morning at that bar, three in another bar, three in another... you won't find all grouped together as was the case in my times. (Key Informant, Italian builder, 19-4-2016)

From the above narration, it seems that illegal intermediaries constitute actors who remedy the gap between older employers and young employees, even if it does not often seem to be the case for Albanian workers, for the reasons presented above. However, the intermediation between the two sides is not undertaken only by social actors who work within the construction industry, but also by various actors of the civil society (like a bartender) who are in contact with many (young) people every day. Thus, I call this type of intermediary as *extraneous broker (caporale estraneo)*. Although there have been research surveys sustaining that the phenomenon of *caporalato* “had died out [...] and reappeared in the labour market for foreigners” (OECD, 2005, p.159), it seems that intermediation of the workforce has been traditionally a hallmark of Italian labour market for specific sectors, such as agriculture and construction (Perrotta and Sacchetto, 2014), in which it still continues to exist.

Let's say that in Lombardy there has always been a kind of caporalato and I call it 'ours' (nostrano)! From Bergamo and Brescia valleys, substantially, there has always been a large movement of personnel which, though qualified, did not have the ability to “be sold” in the market. Teams of workers got together and come with minivans mostly to Milan; and there was one guy a little smarter than others did, and he helped them to find job (Trade Unionist, 19-5-2015, Milan).

From what has been said above, it is obvious that migrant construction workers in Italy may find a job through brokers. Even if they are aware of being exploited by intermediaries, migrants may opt to accept a lower wage, instead of becoming unemployed. This pattern has been generally

linked with the “street corner labour market” in the sense that brokers were used to pick up migrant workers standing on streets and squares waiting for employment opportunities (Allasino *et al.*, 2004). This type of brokerage is undertaken by *professional brokers (caporali professionisti)* that I present in the next section.

3.3.2 Getting a job in open public spaces

Job search in open public spaces in Milan

I begin this section by citing some extracts of my field notes taken during occasional ethnographic observations in Milan (Chapter 2). These notes concern the mornings I spent to observe the mechanism of migrants’ recruitment as it had been reported in other surveys (see for instance Berizzi, 2008) and in the press. Should this has been the case, I had the intention to approach the workers and pretend to be a student searching a job. However, no recruitment process took place in those meeting points the days I was there, something that I was expecting after the first interviews with migrant workers and trade unionists who had not confirmed that such a procedure keep taking place.

I rode the car and arrived in Cuoco square at 5.30am. This place is a bit out of the city centre, and is placed near to the exits for the Milanese ring road. There were not many cars and traffic was rather low. I was looking forward to seeing immigrant workers waiting on the road. [...] However, there was absolutely nothing interesting to observe. I couldn't even see a group of at least three people walking together or standing on the road. Some immigrants, individually, were waiting on the road with small backpacks on their backs. A couple of them had to take the bus, and some others got into a car that stopped in front of them; it was obvious that they knew the car drive, since no interaction took place before they got in the car.[...] After I have wriggled by the square for some minutes, I decided to go to another known meeting point in Corvetto. But no group of workers was waiting either there. [...] I decided to go near to the exits lead on to the ring road, but I didn't observe anything of interest. [...] I turned once again back to the first meeting point in Cuoco square at 6.20am, I stayed there for other 20 minutes, but there was nothing to observe.

(Extract from field notes, Milan, 26/6/2015)

The second instance of observation ended up more or less as the first one:

I rode the car and I arrived to the square near the Lambrate station at 5.30am. There was absolutely nothing to observe. The same situation as three days before. Some people were waiting the bus [...] Next stop was at Loreto square. I left the car and I walked around the square, without something interesting to observe. After a quarter, I decided to move to other meeting points near to San Siro stadium and Lorenzo Lotto square. I drove around the Stadium and I found only a couple of taxi drivers who had a rest or cleaning their cars. I got off the car and approached one of them to have information whether there was any meeting point close to that area. I pretended to seek for some painters to paint my room.

ID: Good morning, may I ask you something?

Taxi Driver: yes, good morning!

ID: I'm seeking for a couple of painters...builders to paint my room. I've been said that there are many construction workers here standing and waiting for job.

Taxi Driver: Workers? For doing what?

ID: Painters whatever... I was searching to get a guy to paint my room. Immigrants, I don't know...

Taxi Driver: Sincerely, I have no idea! Who said it to you?

ID: some friends of mine... I know that construction or manual workers were used to meet here to look for job.

Taxi driver: I don't know. Maybe it was happening in the past, but not any more. Try to ask to the shop of building materials...

[...] After some minutes, I went to Loreto square to observe the people standing on the square. There were some guys sited on the benches, but they weren't dressed with casual clothes. I decided to ask two people working in a food truck. I made the same questions as during the previous conversation with the taxi driver. They hadn't any idea either. The only thing they suggested me to do was to return to the square in the evening when immigrants meet up and enjoy their free time.

(Extract from field notes, Milan, 29/6/2015)

In the next days, I did three more visits to other places known as meeting points for migrants, but the outcome was always the same. I assumed that this hiring process was not carried out in specific urban spaces where a minivan passed by and picked up workers to transfer them around the Milanese building sites. To verify the nonexistence of such visible to all people public places, I asked all my participants about it. To the question “have you ever been in any square or other meeting points in the early morning hours to look for job” or “have you ever heard about the

existence of open places such as squares where builders meet up and search for job”, the answers were constantly negative.

This exists in my country. Here, I don't know. I've never heard about such a thing. (Afrim, aged 51, Milan).

~

In the first years, when we arrived there were (meeting points). But not here in the North. I remember in the south, mainly in agriculture. (Luftar, aged 45 Milan).

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No. There's not. Maybe during the first years. I remember that my brother-in-law had told me that the workers used to go to [name of satellite city] train station and a minivan picked up them to bring them to building sites (Enver, aged 29, Milan).

All respondents seemed to ignore the existence of meeting points where prospective employers and workers meet to set working arrangements. Even for older participants these practices seemed to be completely unknown; only a couple of them declared that they have “heard something about it” in the past. On the contrary, when I asked about the use of open public spaces as meeting points for the recruitment process, trade unionists confirmed that these spaces still exist; they sketched the mechanism as it had been described in Berizzi’s work (2008).

We speak about brokers going to specific squares to pick migrants and take them to the building site. They were obviously exploited, because they work in black economy, and if they took even the 50% of what corresponded to them in the basis of the national agreement, they have to thank them! (Trade Unionist, 19/5/2015, Milan).

However, when I shared with them experiences collected through my observations, they rephrased their statement, pointing out that it mostly happened in the past, but it keeps taking place in a less visible way.

TU: I come from [name of satellite city] and I can get you to the meeting points at 5am where you can see disguised people; men disposed to work for a pottage of lentils. There is the figure of the broker watching over the choices of any individual. The wage slip – when it formally exists - it is subjected to a cut.

ID: I am insisting, because I wondered around some squares in Milan and I haven't noticed anything...

TU: The technology helps from this point of view. Meeting points may be continually shifted. They keep changing places, due to the enforcement of this new law according to which these people go in prison. (Trade Unionist, 6/7/2015, Milan)

What it is reflected from trade unionists' representations of this mechanism is a tendency to overemphasize the existence of this phenomenon until nowadays. I consider that they are emotionally charged when speaking about the "street corner economy" due to the fact that they have been called many times to intervene in such places in the past to protect migrant workers from criminal brokers, as many of them related. However, the mechanism of the migrant workforce recruitment described in previous research (Berizzi, 2008) seems to have changed, as a Trade Unionist describes below.

[...] It does not work out anymore like this. There were three-four places where people met up; one guy passed with the minivan, saying 'you, you, and you... come to work with me'. However, this mechanism is easily identifiable for public security forces; it was something to visible at five in the morning. Today, they all use the new methods of communication, sms, via internet, phone calls. So, a broker has a list as if it were an interim agency; he has a list of people he knows and trusts, and when a company tells him that some 10-15 workers are needed at 7-8 Euro per hour he mediates. It's more frequent in specific communities of immigrant workers; Arab workers or Rumanians. [...] This stuff here has increased a lot with the crisis, although state laws have strengthened... (Trade Unionist, 29/5/2015, Milan)

First of all, the criminalization of illicit brokering (Legislative Decree no 138/2011, Art. 12) has led brokers to abandon the well-known places to the criminal-fighting forces. They may permanently invent new ones. Urban places that have been used as permanent spaces where everyone might get a job in the construction industry, even as a manual worker, does not seem to exist anymore. Brokers have to find out new places to recruit immigrant workers; places in which police cannot easily arrive; beyond suspicion. The mechanism should not be visible and be taken place in foggy social spaces (and Sciortino, 2011). As such can be considered for instance an overcrowded metro station as a Trade Unionist reports:

Last year, we saw it; it was even denounced. There was a large crowd of these guys, young Romanians, getting off Molino Dorino metro station, and, from there, one after the other followed their boss and entered the building site. (Trade Unionist, 9/7/2015, Milan)

A second factor interpreting the mutation of the social organization of the illicit brokering is the availability and affordability of various means of communication. In particular, it can be assumed that any immigrant may have access to a mobile phone and is able to receive and write messages. In this way, brokers can alternate meeting points and do not have to go to squares to recruit people. This procedure can be executed by the means of communication. In this way, it requires just one

SMS to alternate meeting points, so they do not raise suspicion to police and neighbourhood residents.

Third, as it has been reported by Berizzi (2008), job recruitment process in Milanese squares regarded mainly irregular and unskilled migrant workforce. This workforce has been employed to cover the high demand for workforce in a flourishing construction industry during late 1990s and 2000s. Economic recession caused high unemployment levels within migrant construction workers (OECD, 2013a) and, in particular, the limited construction of new buildings required always less manual workers. But even in the cases in which some manual workers are needed, the labour supply is too high so many of regular skilled Albanian migrants may accept to do any tasks, even with a lower retribution as many respondents admitted.

Fourth, it can be assumed that the demand for manual workers was even lower in the recent years, as construction activities largely concern building renovations that mostly require skilled personnel. In this respect, Thiel (2010, p.451) has underlined the significance of references when hiring skilled workers. Subcontractors use networked labour “*whose skill levels could be predicted*”. This standpoint is also expressed by a Trade Unionist.

It's a myth this stuff. Maybe there are; it exists ! There are some people waiting there, but we talk about 40-50 people. [...] the majority of them are picked up to work in portage or transports. Peruvians or Ecuadorians. But, since the newspapers have to invent topics... yes, it's also the newspapers' responsibility. Then, excuse me, in your opinion, is it imaginable that you go to seek workforce among 200 people waiting on the square, if you want to do a decent result for your work? Do you know if these people know to work? What kind of work they know to do? If these people are builders, ironers, drywall plasterers...(Trade Unionist, 8/7/2015, Milan)

A fifth element has to do with Albanian workers' recruitment patterns. As already said, literature on Albanian immigration in Italy has rarely reported cases of irregular migrants who have been inserted in Italian labour market through illicit brokers; rather, they mostly relied on their family networks to find jobs. Albanians' aspirations also for permanent settlement pushed them to develop networks through which they might find free information for job opportunities. Basic level of Italian language permitted Albanians a certain flexibility in the Italian labour market. Albanians' interaction with illicit brokers might have developed over the years in a casual way, that means that it did not concern mainly exploited irregular new arrivals, rather it depends on how one's network has been evolved.

In the light of the findings of this section, I call *professional broker (caporale professionista)* that figure of intermediary who acts as informal staff provider. In other words, his main economic

activity is delivering jobs to construction workers, getting a cut of their wage. *Professional brokers* have often been accused of being part of criminal organizations (Berizzi, 2008), but such an affirmation is not verified in my field data. What seems true from the Italian case study is that *professional broker* might have worked in the past in construction, and, now, he achieves to take benefit of his acquaintances by matching labour demand and supply in a continuous way. This type of intermediary does not seem to influence workers' life outside the building sites, unless the immigrant status is irregular.

All in all, it would not be possible to draw reliable conclusions of the data collected on whether getting a job through illicit brokers might be an alternative solution during the recession; and if yes, whether this option is related with low levels of social capital or other individual characteristics. In any case, this recruiting method has completely different features with respect to the meaning of open public space for Albanian construction workers in Athens, as I illustrate in the next paragraph.

Job search in open public spaces in Athens

As introduced before, Albanian migrants used and revived urban public spaces to enforce their social capital and find job opportunities (Psimennos, 1998; Hatziprokopiou, 2004; Iosifides *et al.*, 2007). Migrant builders, in particular, have often utilized already existed places which served as pool of construction workers from the 1950s onwards (Staveris, 2003; Labroupoulou, 2009), but they also created new meeting points to look for job in construction (Psimennos, 1998) during a prosperous period of the construction sector, from 1990 to 2005.

To analyse the evolution of these urban social spaces and their relevance for Albanians' work life until nowadays, I begin with the notes I collected during the visits to some of the places known as meeting points for migrant workforce. From 1950s until 1980s, traditional meeting points such as Omonoia square or Kotzia square (Staveris, 2003) where builders were used to gather to look for job ceased to constitute meeting places years ago. Hence, I decided to visit some other spaces indicated by some of my participants.

I made four visits in the early morning hours on different days around streets corners in satellite municipalities of Athens. During these instances of observation, it was easily perceptible that street corner labour market does not exclusively concern Albanian immigrants, but also people originated from Middle East or Asian countries, such as Syria, Pakistan or Bangladesh. These people are usually unemployed and unskilled workers who search any kind of job such as working in the fields, gardening and removals.

I arrived in Thivon street at 7 am. I have been said that immigrants gather in front of a shop of building materials to look for job. I left the car and I had a walk around the place. There were 6 people. Looking at their characteristics, I assumed that 4 of them could be Pakistani or Bengalis and the other two originated from Balkan countries. My intention was to speak with them and ask them whether they would like we have a talk. I approached them, and talked to the two guys with Balkan face characteristics. They were both Albanians. They confirmed me that they were there to look for any kind of job such as cleaning, removal, gardening.

(Extract from field notes, Athens, 13/7/2016)

Hiring migrant construction workers on street corners does not happen anymore on a regular basis. Potential employers in construction may rely on street corner labour market only for tasks that do not require any skill. Payments depend on the type of the work and the hours one works. Kastriot, who stood on the corner and accepted to be interviewed, relates:

ID: What kind of jobs do you find there?

K: Whatever you find. Once a week, two times a week... there comes a guy (and ask him to work) for concrete. He gives you 40 euros. I bargain it: I get 45 or 50 euros. If I go for loading-unloading, the price is from 30 to 35. If it's about cleaning or gardening, maybe for 2 hours it's 20 euros or 25. It happened I went to work even for 10 euros. (Kastriot, aged 26, Athens)

Two other respondents relate:

“Piatses” don't exist anymore. Whoever goes there, he seeks for (jobs in) gardening or chores. In general, older workers go there (Agim, aged 40, Athens)

~

If someone still goes there, he is old enough. Those who go there want little money; they don't care for insurance (Avni, aged 34, Athens)

As it comes from the excerpts above, hiring in public urban spaces does not concern anymore the building trades, but any type of occasional jobs. These places do not serve anymore as pool of skilled construction workers, but for those (no or low-skilled) workers finding in a very difficult economic situation. What is more, immigrants standing on such places seem to be ashamed of such a practice. It is not considered anymore as a practice to create social ties, but rather as a forced response to unemployment. Kastriot, the worker I met in one of these meeting points, recounts:

ID: And how did you know about this meeting point?

K: I saw Pakistani people going there. Because there're many piatses here around; even near my house. But, I'm ashamed of going there, even if the payment is better; because (in my neighbourhood) everyone knows me. That's why I go there so far. [...] I get up at 5 o'clock and I arrive there at 7 o'clock. But, the problem is that it happens you go there every day, but it is possible you remain two months without work! Because not always people pass by. People pass by and select you like the sluts. You see a chick, whatever you like, call it "girl you came in." So it's me. Someone comes, and picks me. (Kastriot, aged 26, Athens)

Negative representations of such places were expressed by the majority of my respondents. Going to these places is not considered anymore as an opportunity to create social network. Kastriot's father is an unemployed plumber who is ashamed of waiting for work on street corners. Kastriot had some little experience as plumber. He had worked with his father as a helper to install swimming pools. Now, he cannot find any work through his network and it is the only solution to have some income. Representations of "piatses" for Albanian migrants are rather negative. The majority of the respondents consider these spaces as meeting points for lazy, unskilled workers without any form of social capital.

It doesn't work out like this anymore. Piatses are brought down. These places are for those who don't know how getting a job (Pellumb, aged 48, Athens)

~

These are places where the lazy used to go. You couldn't find any good worker. To employ someone, you have to know him before; otherwise, you cannot trust him. Only Pakistani and Bengalis go there. They know nothing to do (Milot, aged 41, Athens)

Albanians' representation of urban meeting points has been undoubtedly influenced by the fact that many unskilled migrant workers opt to go there to find occasional jobs. These places have been transformed into spaces for those who have no other resources to find a job. As in Milan, even in Athens the technology has mutated this hiring mechanism, since builders may communicate with contemporary means of communication.

In addition, there has been no mention of the existence of some kind of brokers that control in the job recruitment process in these open places. Alban relates:

ID: Was there in piatsa any guy who guide you, or monitor the process?

A: Never did the Albanians have anyone to control them in this sense. Rarely, only in some cases at the beginning, when the people of some village knew a person of reference.

The Albanians never had anyone to control them as happens with Pakistani for example or the Bulgarians, we are independent. (Alban, aged 35, Athens)

As in the case of Albanians in Italy, Albanian migrants' insertion in the Greek labour market has never been intermediated by brokers. In the literature, there has never been any mention of the existence of any type of gangmaster in the construction sector. Albanians have always found information on new jobs through their bonding social ties, or standing on street corners, at the very beginning of their migration experience. The "independence" as a characteristic of Albanian migrants' identity related by Alban is connected with Albanian migration patterns in Greece. As shown in Chapter 1, migratory flows from Albania relied only on social ties, which is related with the geographic proximity of the two countries. Albanians could reach Greece even by feet, so for them the insertion into the Greek labour market has been enabled through social ties. For them, the "independence" of their arrival reflects on the "independence" in navigating the labour market.

Another factor that might have contributed to the non-existence of any type of gangmasters in such open places is the continuous presence of trade unionists. Staveris (2003) and Labropoulou (2009) have argued that *piatses* have not only served as the places where Athenian builders found employment, but as the places when working arrangements were being negotiated with the presence of trade unionists. This factor seems to have created a certain culture in these places that deterred the existence of illicit hiring.

The decline of such places is definitely connected to the access to the new communication technologies that Albanian migrants have for almost two decades. Nowadays, standing on street corners is considered a humiliating and non-prestigious activity for skilled tradesmen, since such places now represent notorious places for "lazy" or unskilled immigrant workers; a practice that Albanian builders' community considers not all decent. Employers have employed workers standing on street corners during times of high labour demand, but, in times of crisis, they can be more selective and seek to find workers who are trustworthy, experienced and do not cause nuisance.

Characterising this practice as survival or tactical is a laborious task, since it depends on the subjective motivations that have not revealed thoroughly from field data. However, it seems that powerless, long-term construction workers who are unskilled use this practice. As such, it may be characterized as a survival practice.

3.3.3 Albanian builders and formal channels of job searching

Temporary work agencies

The increase of precarious forms of employment in the construction sector in Europe has been often connected with the functioning of temporary labour intermediaries (Anderson and Rogaly, 2005; EFBWW, 4/2013, 1/2015; Jounin, 2008). In the last decades, TEAs have played a significant role in mediating between employers and workers (especially migrant labour), but the fact that construction firms resort to TEAs does not necessarily mean a lower cost, rather the possibility to have a pool of flexible workers and informality. In many cases, there has been evidences of exploitative forms of recruiting promoted by such intermediaries, and, in extreme cases, an overlap between labour providers and smugglers (Fudge and Strauss, 2013; Maroukis, 2016).

Temporary work agencies in the Greek construction sector

As introduced before, research on temporary employment agencies in Greece has not confirmed any involvement in the construction sector. It usually concerns domestic sector and hospitals (Maroukis, 2016), but never the construction industry, differently from other European Countries (Balch *et al.*, 2004).

In this respect, Thiel (2010) suggests that employment agencies play a limited role in placing migrants in construction due to the importance of the networked recruitment for building trades. In particular, hiring through network does not only entails low costs, but it also allows “*informal screening and training of workers and provided social control over new recruits through reciprocal, favour-based mechanisms*” (Ibid, p. 451). In other words, formalization of recruitment process in construction cannot go along with informal mores and collective ethics that underpin relations between builders.

Research findings in Greece confirm the negligible role of labour agencies in matching the demand side and the job-seekers in residential construction. A representative of EKA (Centre of Athens Labor Unions) and a Trade Unionist of the Greek Federation of Builders and Related Professions recount:

ID: Is it common that a migrant address to a temporary work agency to find a job in the construction sector?

R: Slavery we call this. Here there's a peculiarity. They have been inserted in sectors in which immigrants are not so active. Within the telecommunications sectors there's a big issue. Mainly, in the call centres where the majority of employees work through a third subcontracting company. In industries, these agencies have not invaded so far. It has also

to do with the balance of power. When trade unions are well-organised with a class-oriented approach, it (the prevalence of agencies) has been deterred. (Representative of the Centre of Athens Labor Unions, 15/12/2015, Athens).

~

ID: Could a migrant contact a temporary work agency to find a job in the construction sector?

TU: Something like that doesn't exist or has not come to our attention so far. [...] in construction these agencies are not active at all, but the icing on the cake is cleaning services. There exists a slave trade and every day you can go to work to a different employer, with different conditions from those agreed with the first one. (Trade Unionist, 12/7/2016, Athens)

As seen in the quotes above, formal labour intermediaries have not been involved in the Greek construction sector so far, but they have a significant presence in cleaning sector and call centres. Furthermore, it seems that institutional actors consider that labour intermediaries largely exploit (migrant) workers. Both trade unionists' representation of labour agencies' activities can be interpreted by referring to the distinction of free/unfree labour promoted by Marxists. In this sense, labourers are unfree when selling their labour and it drives to the reproduction of social classes. Both trade unionists' representations can be also explained by the attachment of both Greek Federation of Builders and Related Professions and Centre of Athens Labor Unions attachment to class-oriented and P.A.M.E. (Panergatiko Agonistiko Metopo – Militant Workers' Front). These representations of labour agencies seem to coincide with Maroukis' (2016) findings on employment agencies in Greece. The author has reported cases in which temporary agencies withheld migrants' passports to blackmail irregular migrants; bribed officials in embassies to issue fake tourist visas; or collaborated with traffickers to recruit migrant workforce.

However, not only Greek institutional actors consider labour agencies as manipulative agents, but also Albanian construction workers do. Even if no one of the respondents have been in contact with any employment agency to find a job in the construction sector, they have claimed that these agencies are involved in stuffing and cleaning services sector. In Valmir's narration, it is confirmed again the absence of labour agencies in construction, and a negative representation of them due to the poor working conditions labourers experience:

ID: But have you ever search a job through temporary work agencies?

V: No, they don't exist (in construction). It mostly concerns the women, in packaging. The daily wage is too low. They employ you for few days and insure you for 1-2 days per month. You don't receive any allowance for Christmas, Easter or holidays. Nothing! My wife works for them in the factories of packaging. They call you and tell you 'come for 4

hours, for 5 days'. The women also go (to work through temporary agencies) for seasonal works. (Valmir, aged 56, Athens).

Negative representations of labour intermediaries as exploitative agents incentivized me even more to look forward to interview some expert working in some temporary employment agency, as I had initially planned. After having received no reply from the temporary employment agencies I had contacted in Athens, I decided to try to contact them by phone. After many efforts, I made it to have a phone conversation with the President of PASIGEE (the National Association of TEAs). Our phone call did not last more than one minute:

ID: Good morning, my name is Iraklis Dimitriadis and I'm contacting you for ...[...]

P: yes, I know. I saw your emails, but I'm sorry. Apart from the fact that we don't have any involvement in construction, I'm not interested at all in participating in such a research because I have already done it in the past, and my sayings have been misconstrued. I have been interviewed by a researcher who published, in a newspaper, things that I had never said. I'm sorry, I am not interested.

I: Ok. I see. Thank you a lot.

Temporary work agencies in the Greek construction sector seem to have not any role. First of all, it would be rather unlikely that employers address to labour agencies due to the high prevalence of undeclared labour in the Greek residential construction (Chapter 4). Informal working arrangements in construction are based on reciprocity and trust between social actors. As analysed in the first section of this Chapter, networked recruitment has been fundamental both for native and Albanian migrant workers in searching a job. Recruitment through labour agencies would only entail higher cost for employers.

Second, the high numbers of unemployed builders during the recession period in combination with the cut of the wages and social benefits and high rates of informality (Chapter 4) allowed employers having a pool of workers who would be eager to work either informally or with a lower retribution. As a Trade Unionist related “*why to address to a labour agency, since everyone can ring hundreds of unemployed mates who would accept to work for little money, or undeclared*”.

Third, as analysed in Chapter 4, structural hallmarks of Greek residential construction such as low incidence of subcontracting in residential construction and the daily system of payment do not create those conditions for which recourse to temporary work agencies would be necessary. Small-scale contractors have an a priori flexible workforce that can hire on a daily basis, without being bound by the terms of any contract.

Consequently, Albanian builders who are not able anymore to get a job through informal networks, it is not very possible to resort to labour agencies to find a new job in residential construction.

Temporary work agencies in residential construction in Milan

Findings from the Italian fieldwork were quite different with regard to the (limited) role of temporary work agencies in residential construction in Milan. Almost all of my respondents have tried to find a job in this way, either in construction or in any other sector (Chapter 5). Sacchetto (2013, p.136) argues that resorting to temporary work agencies became an almost unavoidable step for many migrant workers, even if it is not always considered such an efficient strategy.

In this regard, having failed to get a job through their social network, many Albanian workers contacted temporary work agencies to work as builders. They opted for using formal channels of recruitment, since they have found entrapped into their informal networks.

Getting a job in the construction sector through a temporary work agency seems to be a quite new phenomenon. Indeed, many of my respondents had never heard that someone did find a job as builders through a labour agency. Even for trade unionists, it is not so common to encounter construction workers sent to perform a work at the premises of a construction employer through labour agencies. As it comes from the citations below, asking a job through a labour agency might be a practice undertaken by individuals without much experience in construction.

ID: [...] I'm talking about private work agencies, because in France or in the UK, it's quite a common phenomenon.

T: oh, yes! Formally it exists, some builder could find job in this way, but we talk about marginal stuff. In our sector, it doesn't happen so often. (Trade Unionist, 20/5/2015, Milan)

~

[...] in construction this phenomenon is less present, because there's the possibility to use other forms of – I'm sorry to say it – 'black' labour, that is a construction entrepreneur might rarely contact a labour agency (to employ workers). [...] it's possible to use temporary job contracts through private work agencies from which a construction firm might ask to employ workers within a designated period of time. I repeat: it's rarely used in construction, precisely because the 'piracy' is so vast that one opt to use more 'archaic' practices, much worse than...(temporary work). (Trade Unionist, 7/4/2016, Milan)

~

...those multifunctional agencies that have really exploited the workers, but are legal. It's a form of precarious job. It can be an exception for those starting to work now (without previous experience), or it can be the only alternative solution for those remained unemployed during the economic crisis. (Trade Unionist, 15/9/2015, Milan)

Private employment agencies seem to play only a limited role in the intermediation of migrant labour in Milanese residential construction. There seems to be a low number of private work agencies that cover the construction sector. A possible explanation of this absence could be the prevalence of more 'archaic' forms of working arrangements, that is undeclared employment. As I analyse in the next chapter, informal work is a very common phenomenon in the Italian construction industry. Instead of using temporary workforce through agencies, construction firms may employ undeclared workforce without many risks due to the scarcity of controls (Ambrosini, 2011). Hence, the need for flexible working arrangements can be met through the recourse to any form of informal employment.

Barbieri and Sestito (2008) have argued that employing temporary agency labourers cost more than informal recruitment patterns, as labour agencies have to be paid in money for the services they provide. However, relying on informal work cannot be beneficial only for employers; rather, it can be a source for higher immediate income for workers as well. Comparing the economic benefits between working through a labour agency and working as off-the-books own-account workers, Liridon prefers not to contact labour agencies at any rate:

[...] the builder may work for 10 euro, but he takes 7 euro, because 3 euro go to the labour agency. [...] I don't prefer to go to them (to contact labour agencies). When I hadn't a permanent contract, I did it to find works on my own. Instead of (working through a labour agency and gaining) 900 euro, I can work "black" and bring home 1500 euro. (Liridon, aged 41, Milan)

With regard to workers' representations of labour agencies, many migrants consider these intermediary actors as notorious and unreliable. These findings coincide with Sacchetto's (2014) findings on negative representations of labour agencies of Moroccan and Romanian migrants in Veneto (Italy). The author pointed out that agencies' notoriety may derive from discrimination practices that they employ when migrants contact them.

In French construction, Jounin (2008) highlighted migrant workers' experiences who got jobs through temporary work agencies, putting emphasis on the exploitative working conditions characterized their working arrangements; independently of their immigrant status. Frauds was a widespread phenomenon, since written contractual terms rarely coincided with the initial oral

agreement between agencies and labourers. Even if no one of my respondents had worked in construction through labour agencies, they have such negative representations of agencies' functioning, usually due to the rumours emanating from their networks.

Yes, I have left many CV... many... I've never been called by anyone. So, they didn't have any need of you, first thing; second, they don't know you, who you are and what you do. That's why it always works through acquaintances, even if you are a good worker. (Afrim, aged 51, Milan)

~

I've never done it to work through an agency. I did many CV. I have contacted many agencies, but nobody has called me so far. It's useless. (Artan, aged 43, Milan)

~

I did my CV many times. I have sent one, two, three, thirty (said aloud). If you don't know anyone, nobody takes (employs) you. [...] I've done almost 100 CV. I spent 200 euro of gasoline; I have arrived as far away as Genova and Pavia. They (labour agencies) take your CV and throw it away. It's a gyp! [...] For me, nobody finds job through agencies. It is possible that one out of one thousand may find a job. I don't trust them. (Isuf, Milan, aged 39)

As mentioned before, Albanian builders have always relied on their informal networks to find a job. That prevented them from welcoming the idea of working through labour agencies. Formal intermediary actors have been rarely utilized in the past. Searching job through agencies seems quite vain, and these actors are often considered as unreliable. However, it is quite rational for them that agencies cannot make them work, since they do not know them. For Albanian builders trust is of crucial importance when getting a job in construction through informal networks, since it allows, inter alia, that prospective employee's skill level may be predicted (Thiel, 2010).

Apart from construction workers, agencies may not have even the confidence of Albanian employers. For Albanian self-employed workers, contacting an agency to find workforce may generate disputes between them and labourers, in case that agencies do not respect contractual terms. When employers do not have a direct employment arrangement with the worker, they might not be in position to exert control over their workers. Even if the agreement among the three parts may be a written one, employers do not easily trust the procedure. Reciprocal mechanisms when employing workers and control over recruits (Thiel, 2010) may be of great relevance here. Ibish, a self-employed worker, relates:

With the agencies, there's the risk that you pay the agency, but the agency doesn't pay the worker, can you see? Then, the worker may say that I don't work because I haven't taken

the money from the other part. In addition, these workers don't perform because they aren't your employees; you cannot ask them much to do. (Ibish, aged 38, Milan)

There is also another dimension that may discourage employees to contact employment agencies that is the temporal character of job opportunities. It might be also more relevant for those who have already formed their own families. The non-permanent character of such jobs may be a further disincentive for migrants to contact labour agencies. Jeton is an unemployed worker, father of one child. He did not contact any labour agency because he seeks a permanent job.

You cannot rely on labour agencies. You don't have any permanent contract. They send you here and there; different jobs every time. [...] Even if they say you that they will make a contract, they make you believe that you will be assumed, but, at the end, they gyp you, and you're deluding yourself. (Jeton, aged 35, Milan)

In this point, it is of great relevance to cite my key informant's representation of migrants' interaction with labour agencies. Having already worked through a labour agency as electrician, he puts emphasis on applicants' human capital when contacting work agencies. In this sense, it may be true that workers with low language competences may face difficulties when dealing with formal recruiting institutions (Ambrosini *et al.*, 2014).

K: I've worked through a couple of labour agencies, and I've been very satisfied. [name of labour agency] for example is very serious and professional. I have many friends that they did it to be employed through an agency.

ID: But, what about the agencies of a smaller dimension?

K: they can manoeuvre better with the laws...the small agencies aim to make people go around (to different jobs). So, they aim to keep working with ignorant people. If I go to work through a labour agency and do not ask the regulations... at least, to understand if they gyp me or not. So, if you put at one side ignorant people and, at the other side, sly agencies, you see (he laughs) (Key Informant, Italian builder, 19-4-2016)

From the excerpt above, it can be assumed that working through agencies demands certain language skills when regarding the contractual arrangements. Migrants with low language competences may not be able to understand the contractual terms that they accept to work with, and they may feel exploited when it comes to be paid, for instance.

Although it seems quite uncommon for builders to find job in construction, one of my respondents, Tariq, stated that the firm he worked for employed a worker for a couple of months through a labour agency. In addition, another respondent, Edvin, owner of an individual firm,

admitted that when he needs manual workers, it is possible to call a labour agency to employ some workers.

When I need many unskilled workers, I address to agencies. They send me legal workforce, I pay them in a daily basis for the work they have done and that's all. I am serene and any responsibility is theirs. (Edvin, aged 39, Milan)

Edvin's and Tariq's sayings confirm that labour agencies may have a limited role in leasing workforce in residential construction in Milan. These two cases share a common feature that is the locality of the building site. In both cases, the building sites they work in are found in the city centre of Milan where the probability of a control by inspectorate is relatively high as referred by all interviewees. Hence, employing services of work agencies might be a solution for specific temporary works that might not demand any skills (manual works), but it seems to be connected with the probability that one firm may be controlled by competent authorities.

As it was the case in Greece, I faced the same attitude by private employment agencies in Milan; even if I sent many emails to both agencies' associations and experts, I did not accomplished to interview any agent. During the only phone conversation I had with an employee of a labour agency, she explained me that they do not offer services in this sector. However, since trade unionists and workers' narrations demonstrated the (limited) role of private labour agencies in the intermediation between construction firms and builders, I consider that it was the labour agencies indifference on contributing to a sociological research.

From the above findings, it can be said that contacting labour agencies may constitute a tactic undertaken by migrant builders during the crisis. The occasional nature of employment and the dependent way in which migrants may take a job qualifies such a response as tactic. As in other cases, this tactic constitutes a response by *entrapped or expectant* migrants who do not receive information on job vacancies by their networks anymore. An interesting point is also the information asymmetry between labour agencies and migrants. Labour agencies seem to be the powerful agent that makes the rules, whereas migrants may grasp passively opportunities proposed by the first. Lack of language competence and knowledge on labour law make this asymmetry even more acute. Hence, *entrapped* migrants seem weak actors navigating in a location owned by the adversary (De Certeau, 1984), and not having the capacity to mobilise resources to potentially alter structures. However, *expectant* migrants might take benefit of such a tactic if they are able to demonstrate their skills to the potential employer. In this case, they may use the temporary job opportunity to expand their social ties.

In the last paragraph of the findings regarding Albanians' recruitment through formal channels in residential construction in Milan and Athens, I put the spotlight on job search on the Internet.

Job search on the Internet

According to the literature on job recruitment process, low skilled labourers rarely rely on newspaper advertisements when searching job (Boheim and Taylor, 2001). In the past, only few studies have mentioned that migrant construction workers have used formal channels to search job opportunities, since information flowing through their informal networks was usually sufficient to find employment (Balch et al. 2004; Iosifides *et al.*, 2007). Nowadays, though, searching a job through formal channels is an increasing trend, but it mostly regards state employment centres or temporary work agencies within packaging, cleaning services, restauration and hotels (Sacchetto and Vianello, 2014; Maroukis, 2016).

With regard to job searching on the internet, incompetency in language and unfamiliarity with institutional mechanisms may constitute barriers that prevent migrants from using computers to seek employment (Boheim and Taylor, 2001). In addition, it could be said that, at least at the beginning of their migratory path, migrants might not have the economic means to have access to computers and internet; or, even the skills to operate a number of communication modes. Therefore, studying vacancies and answering advertisements in sources such as internet or journals has been always less probable among migrant population (Frijters *et al.*, 2005). In their study on immigrant job search in the UK, the authors sustained that job search of immigrants through formal channels was less successful than that of native people, but the probability of success might increase with years since migration. Findings from another research on German and Japanese labour markets (Suvankulov *et al.*, 2012) suggested that immigrant job seekers were less likely to find employment in a 12-month period due to discrimination connected to prolonged unemployment spells.

Existing studies on job search on the internet reveal also that cost of internet hiring for employers is lower (Barber, 2006). By using the internet, in general, employers have the possibility to select the most right candidate for the job out of a big pool of applicants for each position. That author argues also that the time of recruitment process is significantly reduced since job posting, applicant response and resume processing are faster.

On the other hand, the big number of candidates and the large share of unqualified applicants are considered disadvantages of this recruiting method (Brencic and Norris, 2008). Further drawbacks connected to job search on the internet regard candidates' privacy intrusion, and lower wages and level of jobs. Compared to job recruitment through informal networks, it has been pointed out that references are of great importance for potential employers (Bauder, 2005; Fountain 2005). Contrary to the views cited in the previous paragraph, it has been argued that employing personnel through such formal channels is costly and more time-consuming (Fountain,

2005). The outcomes of recruiting through informal networks may be better, since hiring when prior relationship of trust already exists allows a better match between the person being referred and job vacancy.

Almost all of my respondents have sought to find job opportunities on the internet. However, they did not find it easy to get employment using this channel; being hired through internet advertisements proved remarkably rare. Despite their qualifications and experience as construction workers, they have usually experienced rejection when they came across an advertisement concerning construction trades. Hence, searching job on the internet may be a difficult and demoralizing process.

I've always sought on the internet, but, at the end, I haven't found anything. Always through my friends, my acquaintances. (Beqir, aged 27, Milan).

~

I sent too many CV. I applied many times but, at the end, nobody called me. Nothing! (Saban, aged 41, Milan)

Getting a job in construction through such a formal procedure does not seem a feasible and reliable option. Migrants' representations of job search via internet are rather negative. Migrant builders consider that search on the internet cannot bring outcomes, since employers have traditionally relied on references when hiring workers (Balch *et al.*, 2004). Further, based on what they have been said by colleagues of theirs, they may consider this channel of information as a fraud.

Yes, many times big companies search workers. You may find (a job), but most people have many complaints. (Gjin, aged 34, Athens)

~

Many people use the internet, but it's a gyp. It's never happened to me to find any job through internet. Never! (Avni, aged 34, Athens)

~

They're lying! A friend of mine worked like this for one week, but, at the end, they've never paid him. If you don't know him (the employer) how (do you decide) to go (to work for him)? That's the reason I've never lost any money. (Leka, aged 54, Athens)

~

Any subcontractor who gets a worker through internet, you see, he is not right. He'll not pay your daily wage. He'll keep you for five six days and he'll kick you out or he'll disappear. (Valbon, aged 56, Athens)

For almost all of my respondents who have sought for a new job on the internet outcomes have been rather meagre. On one hand, it is the overall low demand for construction workforce that

demoralizes migrant builders, since it is expected that applicants will be too many for few vacancies. On the other hand, internet research and CV filling require human capital that migrants may not possess. Migrant who lack appropriate language skills are not able to perform an adequate search on the internet to find out about possible vacancies suitable for them. Language competences also play an important role in creating a CV or, even more, a cover letter.

Apart from language competences, migrant builders may lack the appropriate IT skills to access computers or emails. Indeed, many of them admitted that they did the on-line search with the help of their sons or friends; only one of my respondents has been trained in information technology. In this case, it can be assumed that younger migrant builders would be more able to do a more effective search (Frijters *et al.*, 2003), since they may have transferred their human capital acquired prior to immigration; they are borne in a period when information technology had been already introduced as a school subject in Albanian schools.

An interpretation that goes beyond structural barriers due to the economic crisis or lack of human capital could be based on Albanian migrants' habitus (Bourdieu, 1977); that is the set of individual dispositions that social actor interiorize after a long period of experience with certain factors and situations. First, the majority of over 40-year-old Albanian builders have never had any experience of using technology when applying for jobs. Job recruitment process in Albania relied quite exclusively on formal institutions, so Albanians have never been familiar with information technology. This reminds a relevant research on employment practices of immigrants to access the Canadian labour market (Bauder, 2005). In that case, the author illustrated that Yugoslavian immigrants rarely relied on informal networks due to their habitus shaped in their country of origin. In the former Yugoslavia, job-seekers relied largely on formal qualifications and institution networks. Thus, it is expected that Albanian builders do not have trust in digital channels of hiring, also because internet frauds is a wide-spread phenomenon in the globalization era (Koong *et al.*, 2008). However, negative representations may be interpreted as attempts to reduce the cognitive dissonance, in the sense that Albanian migrants may justify their lack of IT skills and language proficiency by considering this channel of recruitment as a fraud.

Second, being a good worker is something that can be proved on site (Paci, 1973; Labropoulou, 2009; Thiel, 2010), and CV has not ever had any association with builders' careers. This can be the case for the Italian and Greek construction where trade formation is not obligatory and certificates do not play any role in accessing building sites. It is even more relevant for the Greek residential construction that is less regulated (Chapter 1). As a result, any kind of formalization of hiring process is placed beyond the habitus of Albanian workers shaped in Italy and in Greece.

Third, both in Italy and Greece, Albanians entered the local labour markets where hiring practices in construction were based quite exclusively on personal referrals (Balch *et al.*, 2004; Maroukis,

2009). In this way, employers achieved to find the most suitable worker through referrals; otherwise, “*you are not a right employer*”, as a respondent said. As it has been reported in other research surveys (Maroukis, 2010; Perrotta, 2011), networked employment relations are of great importance in the Italian and Greek construction sector, where employers require trust from their employees because of the prevalence of informal economic patterns (Chapter 4).

All in all, search for jobs on the internet in construction is not a familiar and effective practice for Albanian builders and, as a result, people do not seem to rely on such a formal channel. Few job opportunities during the recession years, the central role of trust in job recruitment process and the habitus of Albanian builders and that of local employers made job search on the internet an insignificant hiring practice.

In this case too, Albanians’ efforts to get a job searching on the internet cannot be considered as a strategy. The sporadic efficiency of such a practice and the information asymmetry between migrants and the other part (employers or labour agencies posting advertisements) qualifies it as a tactic. Web sites and internet also constitute a space that cannot belong to migrants. Searching on the internet has been carried out by those *entrapped* or *expectant migrants* in periods of long-term unemployment, and it might serve as a way to persuade themselves that no alternative options existed in terms of employment opportunities.

3.4. Conclusions

This chapter studied Albanian migrants’ responses to find new jobs and secure their employment in construction during the recession years. In doing so, I analysed the informal and formal channels through which Albanian builders get a job in residential construction in Milan and Athens. The empirical findings confirm and strengthen sociological approaches on the importance of networked recruitment of immigrants for low skilled jobs (Granovetter, 1974), as those in construction (Thiel, 2010). In contributing to these issues, from one side, I highlighted how Albanian builders have accessed, maintained or enhanced their social capital during the economic recession to cope with widespread unemployment within the construction industry in the two contexts. From the other side, I explained why formal channels of recruitment should not be considered as reliable alternative ways to get a job in construction for those failing to be employed through their informal networks.

For both contexts, my research suggests that social networks have continued to provide information about job opportunities for those who developed weak ties with native people and colleagues, which, in turn, allowed them transforming their social capital to cultural capital. In this respect, language skills have been of particular importance, since Albanian migrants could

(occasionally) undertake works mainly as off-the-books own-account construction workers in the informal economy of Milan and Athens (Chapter 4). In particular, this phenomenon has been also connected with migrants' propensity to self-employment, that is those with some latent entrepreneurial aspirations.

On the other hand, it appears that bonding ties have constrained Albanian builders' agency. Indeed, many workers seem to be *entrapped* into their networks and have remained unemployed for long periods, since information on jobs does not flow anymore. Albanian builders also who have been attached to their work identity and did not advance their skills seem to be entrapped into their social networks. On the contrary, Albanian migrants who moved away from their trade clusters that were connected to the initial phases of building construction, and followed formation in other building trades (connected to building repair) accomplished to maintain and expand their social ties. It has been also illustrated how social capital durability might depend on migrants' financial capital, in the sense that women's employment gave the possibility for Albanian males to wait until opportunities appear.

Regarding informal networking through illicit brokers in Italy, I cannot make reliable assumptions on whether this practice could be a reliable option to get a job, due to the lack of empirical data that could sustain such a hypothesis. However, it can be said that recent legislative initiatives and access to means of communication by all migrants have rendered the mechanism quite invisible. Moreover, permanent meeting points in corner streets and squares do not constitute anymore spaces of illicit hiring for migrants; even if, in the case of Albanians in particular, these places have not ever been spaces for finding employment, since Albanian workers have largely achieved to access the labour market using their bonding social ties (Kosic and Triandafyllidou, 2003).

In view of the findings, I propose a typology of informal brokers in the Italian construction sector in order to increase the understandings of how intermediation of labour takes place. The typology is based on brokers' activities, individual characteristics and frequency they act.

The *artisan broker* is a self-employed worker who intermediates between subcontractors and labourers in a building site where he already works. He makes profit out of the wages of the group of the workers who are hired by him, or by any other subcontractor when he serve as reference for other workers. He is paid to match the demand and supply of labour when offers information to both sides (workers and other subcontractors), whereas he is paid for the provision of employment opportunities to the workers with whom he usually collaborates by virtue of "making them work" in a big building project for instance. For some nationalities (e.g. Egyptians) the *artisan broker* may also be a "co-ethnic broker" (Ambrosini, 2016), and offers accommodation and documents to irregular workers. As a matter of fact, he may act either in a continuous or sporadic way.

The second type of intermediation is the provision of services by *mate brokers* who match the labour and the demand side. A *mate broker* is usually a relatively young, dependent worker who possesses an extended social network of native and migrant workers and employers. He is contacted by the employers he has worked with in the past, and provide information on jobs to other mates. He makes profit out of his mates' daily or hourly wages. The *mate broker* intermediates on a rather sporadic basis, when there is high demand for labour.

The third type of intermediaries is the *extraneous broker*. He is an external actor, as he does not form part of the construction sector. He is a professional who carries on his activities outside the building sites, and, at times, he has no relation with building trades. As such, the *extraneous broker* may be the owner of a shop of building materials or the bartender. Working in or even owning a space frequented by unemployed people, he may be informed on the available workforce in his district, and, at the same time, he can be contacted by employers who trust him. By the same token, a building material shop may be a pool of unemployed workers, where both employers and employees may seek information.

The *professional broker* is the intermediary who match migrant builders with opportunities for work, usually in big building projects. He is usually a former construction worker, with extended social network who acts in a continuous way. Intermediating between labour and demand side constitutes his unique professional activity, in that of a continuous nature. The role of the *professional broker* could also undertake a labour agency in the sense that it provides undeclared services. It is expected to be a labour agency of small dimensions.

As regards now the case of Albanians in Athens, open places where migrants found job opportunities in construction do not exist anymore, since new technology have changed the interactions between network members. Nowadays, those one-time places of socialization are considered notorious places for lazy, unskilled or marginalized individuals that are in contrast with skilled tradesmen' ethics.

Concerning the formal channels for recruitment, labour agencies seem to have a limited role in the Italian residential construction, since informal recruitment permits the perpetuation of control over new recruits, and the trust that characterizes builders' ethics (Thiel, 2010). The possibility also to resort to cheaper informal workforce can be considered a further barrier for labour agencies participation in this sector. Temporary work agencies might lease unskilled workers for limited period of times, mainly in Milan's city centre where the probability of inspectorates' presence seems to be higher. In contrast, labour agencies involvement in the Greek construction does not exist at all, due to the prevalence of informal working arrangements and the peculiarities of Greek legislation that provides the daily hiring of migrant workers.

Job search on the internet might not be considered as an alternative strategy to find a job, due to the lack of IT skills from the majority of Albanian builders in both contexts, and Albanians' habitus with regards recruitment processes that has been shaped both in the country of origin and destination.

Turning to the different nature of practices, it can be said that a series of practices can be characterised as *survival*, since it seems that such acts constitute a passive, no-alternative options, not including any level of agency. It is the case when *entrapped* migrants receive economic assistance from friends, being employed through illicit brokers accepting exploitative conditions, or go to the street corner labour market to find any kind of job. Illicit brokering and open place labour market might be proved as *tactical* for those *expectant* migrants who have skills and may use this channel temporarily. The same is true also for those who get a job through labour agencies, even if it seems quite rare. *Dynamic* migrants with higher levels of social, cultural and financial capital may be able to use their social networks on demand, in the sense that they are able to find job when the economic activity improves. In the meanwhile, they aim to increment their cultural capital by reskilling, or starting up a parallel individual firm. In this case, they make *strategic* use of the informal networks which constitute an indispensable source of agency.

In the light of these findings, I argue that when job opportunities are limited, the efficiency of the job search and securing employment continuity of migrant construction workers depends on a series of factors at the micro and meso-level. The first determinant for the successful job search and employment continuity consists in migrants' social ties prior to the economic crisis. *Expectant or dynamic* migrants who had socialized with native workers and used bridging and weak social ties to get employment in the past seem to be able to resume easier their work after unemployment periods. On the other hand, *entrapped* migrants who had exclusively relied on bonding and strong social ties seem to be unable to find new job opportunities. This is even more relevant for those whose networks weakened due to their colleagues' decision to return back to their home country.

Second, a salient feature that may increase Albanian masons' employability is acquiring new skills through training courses in construction. Reskilling and knowledge about the use of new building materials coupled with demand for repair and renovation in old buildings. *Dynamic* actors who are able to have information on formation course may increment their cultural capital and utilize their social ties to ensure continuity of their trades. On the other hand, those construction workers who were *entrapped* into their trade, usually connected with the initial stage of construction projects (carpenters, ironworkers), seem to be the most affected by the effects of recession.

Third, *expectant or dynamic* migrant workers who have aspirations to become self-employed workers seem more likely to seize new job opportunities. This is extremely relevant with the

prevalence of informal working patterns and the possibility to work as off-the-books own-account workers (Chapter 4). Indeed, migrants may undertake works without having to pay for taxes, and maximize their income. In this respect, there are also two important factors to take into consideration. On the one hand, migrants with long-term stay permit may bargain better prices for private works, or negotiate informal working terms with subcontractors more efficiently (Chapter 4). On the other hand, it is also of crucial importance migrants' proficiency in local language that permits them to widen their network and acquire new clients.

Fourth, another determinant that ensured continuity of work or reintegration in construction has been migrants' financial capital. It might be said that *dynamic* migrants who had more savings could resist more during unemployment times or periods in which they have worked in a casual way. Solidarity also in the form of financial assistance has been crucial for long-term unemployed *expectant or entrapped* workers. In addition, emotional support to vulnerable conationals has been a way to counter crisis negative effects.

Last but not least, it is important to note that other individual characteristics such as age and family situation have interplayed with above mentioned factors. For instance, it seems that younger migrants have been more able to acquire new skills, and those without families have been in a better economic position and, thus, more "resistant" to unemployment. Wife's employment (Chapter 5) may be also very relevant to migrants' decision not to return back to their country and maintain their networks in the destination country.

Chapter 4

Albanian builders' engagement in informal employment

4.1 Introduction

Writing about “informality” in relation to migrant labour is not a simple matter. The complexity arises primarily from the confusion when defining the phenomenon. “*Underground*”, “*shadow*”, “*informal*”, “*undeclared*” are only few of the adjectives that have been used to describe the same phenomenon (ILO, 2016). This intricacy is increasing due to the interdisciplinary nature of this phenomenon: economists, political scientists, sociologists examine the question using different theories and methodological tools. The analysis of informal economy can become even more complicated when studying the construction sector; a sector with so a complex structure (Chapter 1), which employs migrant workers whose (irregular) immigrant status may interplay with formal employment.

By putting together informal economy and immigration, it has been shown a close connection between the subject of the sociology of immigration and the informal economy, in the sense that in Western “developed” countries immigrants are usually overrepresented in those unregulated activities (Portes, 1995, p.23-30). In fact, one can find migrants working occasionally in the construction sector in an informal way, not being declared in the books, just to have a complementary income, or undertaking some extra work on top of a regular working week. These informal forms of employment are often enforced by segmentation; by nationality; migratory status and skills (Morrison, Sacchetto and Cretu, 2013).

As introduced in the previous chapters, informal employment is concentrated in construction. Informality in construction includes various facets such as informal construction firms; informal labour, the informal construction system and informal buildings or settlements (Buckley *et al.*, 2016). The absence of legal building permit issued by municipalities cannot result into formal economic activities; the same is true for renovations and demolitions. Even if a legal permit exists, non-compliance with health and safety laws or local building codes is another form of informality; or, when contractors hire sub-contractors who, in turn, hire not registered firms. Another form of informal work consists also in employing undocumented migrants; or self-employed workers working for many years for the same employer. For Wells (2007), when studying informality in construction it is crucial to take into consideration four aspects of regularity: regularity of firms; the terms and conditions of employment; the process of construction and of the product. The same

scholar supports that it is misleading to make assumptions either for workers' legality or illegality, rather there is usually a continuum with regard to formal and informal employment in this sector.

Throughout the data collection, I was constantly coming across recounts on migrants' engagement into informal economic activities. Rather than the frequent occurrence of participants' recounts about undeclared employment, it was the great variety of forms of undeclared employment that incentivized me to dedicate a whole chapter to explore their engagement in informality during the recession period.

Having said that, the main aim of this chapter is to shed light on the different nuances of informal employment in which Albanian migrants have been engaged during the economic crisis. The rationale for digging into various forms of informal employment is to better understand whether migrants' participation in informality can be characterized as an alternative option during hard times. Are migrants forced to be engaged into informality, or informal practices may be the outcome of a reciprocal benefit between employers and workers? In other words, I try to comprehend under which conditions migrants' involvement in undeclared employment can be strategical, tactical (De Certeau, 1984), or, just survival. What are the factors that determine migrants' capacity to take benefit from such activities? Investigating these questions, I show how individual characteristics and social structures interplay, and how the outcome of such interaction may enforce or constrain migrants' bargaining power.

To study the various forms of informal employment through migrants' work experiences and representations of various institutional actors and stakeholders, I use theoretical insights on informal economy and some of the concepts analysed in Chapter 1. In particular, I largely use De Certeau's (1984) distinction of strategy and tactic, and the concept of social embeddedness, in the sense that immigrants' involvement in informal activities is embedded in social structures, shared meanings and cultures, reciprocity expectations (Granovetter, 1974; Portes, 1995).

Although Portes' (1995), Buckley and colleagues (2016) and Wells (2007) above-mentioned categories on migrant labour engagement in informal employment might serve as basis to study informality, this categorization seemed inadequate for the study of Albanian migrant workers in the Greek and Italian construction. In spite of the difficulty to create distinct categories regarding undeclared work, I distinguish three general categories of informal employment. The first category comprises forms of under-declared employment; where a construction worker is officially registered and is paid a supplementary undeclared wage in addition to the official declared one. Within the second category there are works hired off the books; those are either construction workers who are not registered in social documents, or undeclared workers in construction, but declared to official authorities for another working activity, that is working in

construction is a second irregular activity next to a regular one. The third category encompasses forms of informal employment characterised by bogus or falsified working arrangements²⁶; where employment is characterised by a certain amount of regularity, but working arrangements are partially (semi-compliant)²⁷ or totally false. In each of this category, I created many sub-categories that have been crucial to the examination of migrants' informal practices in Milan and Athens.

In this chapter too, I return to the three migrant profile proposed in Chapter 3, that is the *entrapped*, *expectant* and *dynamic*. Here, the aim is to build upon the already identified characteristics for each category by adding new individual features with respect social actors' engagement in undeclared employment. In general, *entrapped* migrants seem powerless and are compelled to accept work conditions due to their poor social and cultural capital, and, often by lack of regular status. *Expectant* migrant profiles have constrained ability to negotiate informal working arrangements, and may enjoy benefits temporary from informal economy. *Dynamic* migrants are those autonomous actors who take advantage of informal employment.

In the next section, I make a brief literature review on informal economy in Italy and Greece, focusing on construction and migrant labour. The third section integrates my own findings, and the chapter ends with conclusions on factors influencing social actors' negotiating power.

4.2 The extent, the nature and reasons of prevalence of the informal economy in Italy and Greece

Before moving to the analysis of my data, I briefly reconstruct the literature regarding the extent of underground economy, the nature of informal economic activities and the reasons of their prevalence in both Italy and Greece.

Bitzenis' (2015) literature review on the prevalence of the underground economy in three different countries gives useful insights on the phenomenon in Italy. Although the exact size of the underground economy is difficult to estimate, it has been argued that Italian shadow economy accounts for 16,5% of GDP (Ardizzi *et al.*, 2013). Differently to those estimations that do not

²⁶ In recent studies, this phenomenon concern mainly self-employed workers who describe their employment status/relation as "employee" rather than as "self-employed" (Jandl *et al.*, 2009; Ruhs and Anderson, 2010; Krings *et al.*, 2011; Morrison *et al.*, 2014).

²⁷ With regard to workers' migratory status, Ruhs and Anderson (2010, p.195-196) locate this kind of workers in the category of "self-compliance" which can be seen as "a distinct and contested space of (il)legality, [...] which refers to the employment of migrants who are legally resident, but working in breach of the employment restrictions attached to their immigration status".

take into consideration illegal economic activities, Schneider and colleagues (2010) found that the size of the Italian unobserved economy is 27% of GDP²⁸.

Summarising the driving forces behind citizens' engagement in informal economic activities in Italy, Perletti (2013) argues that those are of economic, institutional and cultural nature. First, it is economic forces pushing social actors to be engaged in informal economic activities, that is the effort to save money by not paying taxes and social contributions. Second, the institutional factor refers to the lack of trust towards formal institutions (for instance the inefficacy of the justice, the big size of public sector, in Dell'Anno and Schneider, 2003), and the normative uncertainty characterising new contractual forms. Hence, the greater is the incidence of these two features, the more the social actors tend to enter the shadow economy (Timpano, 2008). Third, the cultural variable entails in the decline of values referable to civic virtues, the deterioration of the social capital fabric, and the acceptance and tolerance towards those engaged in informality (Reyneri, 2001; Bellavista, 2008). A relevant research for instance found out that Italian students declare less than UK students (Lewis *et al.*, 2009).

Turning now to the informal employment, Baculo (2006) considers that informality may be the outcome coming from two forces: from the demand side, that is the query of companies to pay less taxes and social contributions in order to be more competitive, and, from the supply side, that is workers' practices to defraud the state. The latter usually believe that being engaged in informal economic activities is not a negative practice, but rather it is a justified in the face of public service inefficiencies and state corruption and favouritism. In this sense, Cremers (2006, p.7) has argued that – especially in the Southern regions – undeclared employment is a structural feature of the labour market, at times “*an approved social practice in the economy*”.

Regarding the Greek case, estimates on the Greek shadow economy vary according to the method and approach adopted to measure the phenomenon. Bitzenis and colleagues (2016) have presented various measurements for informal economic activities in Greece occurred during the last decade. It is clear that no clear convergence of opinion has been so far. The authors have given an estimation on the average of various measurements, and stated that the shadow economy in Greece is about of 24,3% of GDP. As regards the workforce, according to the Greek inspection bodies data (Kapsalis, 2012), the percentage of undeclared workers was 30% of the total employed people.

²⁸ Variabilities on measurement may be due to the discordance on what is measured, and the different estimation methods adopted (Currency Demand Approach, MIMIC approach ecc).

The great extent of informal economy seems to derive mainly from the mistrust between the Greek state and its citizens (Ballas and Tsoukas, 1998), and the tax burdens (Christopoulos, 2003). Kaplanoglou and Rapanos (2013) have argued that the low tax morality within the Greek society is the principal reason for which Greek citizens evade normal tax obligations. This general distrust towards the formal institutions is further alimeted by the reciprocity between individuals and state agents (at times rent-seeking); by the fact that tax non-compliance became a “social norm” (Alm and Trogler, 2011); and, it is influenced by the views or behaviours of the social environment on the utility for paying taxes (Luttmer and Singhal, 2015).

Other factors that generate informality are related to the high rates of unemployment and austerity measures (tax increases). On this aspect, informal economic activities may be undertaken as means of survival strategies (Matsaganis, Leventi and Flevotomou, 2012; Schneider et al., 2010; Anagnostopoulos *et al.*, 2015). Reviewing recent measures to combat undeclared work, Kapsalis (2012; 2015) has claimed that not only control mechanisms are inefficient, but also new measures adopted during the last years go once again to the wrong direction. By identifying bottlenecks in the new legislative initiatives, the author contends that austerity regulations have fuelled the phenomenon of undeclared employment. During the recession years, he argues that the most relevant factors for which undeclared work insists and grows are, firstly, the increased taxation for salaried personnel and pensioners, in combination with the overriding feeling of the dissolution of public services and structures (hospitals, education, welfare). Secondly, it is due to the low citizens’ expectation to be granted a decent pension; new higher age limits were introduced with the new social insurance system. As a result, the author states that there will be the very employees, at times, recommending to their employers to be paid part of their wage cash-in hand; to virtually dismiss them to have access to unemployment benefits. He claims that the persistence of undeclared economy is due to the inefficiency of control mechanisms and measures (for the Italian case see for instance Reyneri, 2001; Ambrosini, 2011).

4.3 Informal employment, construction industry and immigrants

Attention then turns to the rife informal work within the construction industry (Cremers and Janssen, 2006; Dekker *et al.*, 2010). The Eurobarometer survey on undeclared work of 2007 reveals that the participation in undeclared or under-declared work within construction is of 17%; the highest percentage compared to all other sectors: 16% for repair services (home improvement and maintenance trades), and 12% in agriculture (Dekker *et al.*, 2010).

Even if informal work is a regular occurrence in construction, only few studies have focused on its prevalence within it. Williams and colleagues only recently published two pieces of work on the nature of undeclared employment in construction (Williams *et al.*, 2011), and the motives of informally employed construction workers (Williams and Nadin, 2012). Based on quantitative data, these studies reveal that the majority of construction workers are engaged in informal employment out of choice. It is argued that unregistered services in construction are carried out mostly by, and offered to, relatives, friends or neighbours who decide to bypass monetary transactions.

Alluding to qualitative research analysis in the European construction sector, there are only few sociological works in the field. Focusing on migrants, I have individuated four case studies that make, *inter alia*, particular focus on migrants. First, Darren Thiel (2012a) investigates the organizational features of the building project, and the role and profile of actors involved in the sector, studying, at same time, builders' class, gender and ethnicity in the UK construction industry. Another remarkable ethnographic research has been held in the building sites in and around Paris (Jounin, 2009). The French scholar highlights the daily humiliation against immigrants, the violation of working rights in the sector and the job recruitment (informal) strategies of agencies and immigrants. In Italy, there seems to be only one ethnographic research in the field, that of Perrotta (2011) in which the author observes the relations of Romanian migrants with their co-nationals, with other migrants and with their employers. He examines also Romanian builders' engagement in informal working arrangements, highlighting the relevance of migratory status in the bargaining process. Fourth, Berntsen (2016) brought to the fore migrant builders' (informal) practices to resist to Dutch labour market flexibility and trade unions' strategies to protect migrant labour. This author focuses on the difficulties that both actors face to improve working conditions and defend labour rights.

Focusing now on Italy and Greece, since the Nineties, when both countries started to receive mass immigrant flows, myriads of undocumented migrant workers have been employed in the construction industry (see for instance Mingione, 1985; Psimmenos, 1995; Iosifides, 1996; Droukas, 1998; Lazaridis and Romaniszyn, 1998; Reyneri, 1998). The increasing demand for cheap labour workforce and the structural characteristics in both labour markets (Chapter 1) have contributed to the explosion of migrants' informal employment. On the one hand, informality was a convenient and beneficial practice for businesses and families (Reyneri, 2003; Ambrosini, 2008; Maroukis, 2013). That demand for cheap labourers, both from businesses and families, was covered by relying on informal irregular workers, who contributed to secure private companies' profits, and to heal problematic (or absent) welfare provisions. In this sense, it is important to consider also the demand side, that is clients or employers' demands for informal services. On

the other hand, informal employment enabled immigrants' integration into the labour market, given the dysfunctional policies adopted by both states that constrained irregular migrants' access formal work.

In Italy, Reyneri (1998) claimed that underground economy had a pull effect on migrant workers. Low-skilled and poor social status occupations in small firms and care work services to households definitely attracted undocumented migrants who were more prone to being engaged in informal employment. In other words, immigrants' involvement in the underground economy was not a new element in the Italian labour market, but it constituted a continuity in the economic organisation (Quassoli, 1999). Moreover, Venturini and Villosio (2008) stated that due to the seasonal and temporary nature of job opportunities, immigrants were usually engaged in informality, without having the opportunity to follow an evolving and continuous professional career.

Further, Maroukis and colleagues (2011) stated that irregular migration and informal economy have been complementary phenomena in Greece, in the sense that the viability of small or medium (family) companies relied on the use of undocumented migrants (Maroukis, 2013). Those undocumented migrants usually substituted or complemented family members or internal native migrants; the nature of small firms did not change significantly with the arrival of undocumented migrants, since they continued to use undeclared workforce. It comes, therefore, that there was ingrained tolerance of Greek society for informal economy. In addition, also the political system enabled its reproduction with the introduction of migrant categories that did not reflect the needs of local labour market.

In the next sections, I analyse my empirical findings aiming at shedding light on all the forms of undeclared employment tracked down in the Italian and the Greek context, and the reasons for which Albanian workers are engaged in informal economic activities. Before proceeding with the analysis, it is necessary to refer to some peculiarities of the Greek legislative framework regarding the residential construction.

4.4 Notes on some peculiarities of Greek regulatory system relevant for construction

As discussed in Chapter 2, except for plumbers and electricians, own-account workers in the Greek residential construction sector do not have to be registered with the Social Security Organization for the Self-Employed (OAEE). Painters and builders, for instance, may carry out activities in construction sites and undertake the role of (sub)contractor without being registered

as free-lancers. At the same time, they can make profit as subcontractors for the execution of a specific work done by more workers. In other words, any builder may hire off the books a team of workers for the duration of a specific work, undertaking the role of (sub)contractor without being registered with any authority, and reap surplus profit through wage labour. Unregistered subcontractors may undertake the execution of building works and have extra roles, including directing and supervising personnel, or even working as all other workers. In the latter case, (sub)contractors' contributions are deducted by the developer, while they should issue an invoice from an invoice book that the Tax Authority issue them in a yearly basis. This category of (sub)contractors has to make a return each year to include profits from trade. In this dissertation, for simplification reasons, this category will be named *small-scale (sub)contractors*, following the Greek terminology (*μικροεργολάβοι*). Consequently, the Greek legislator does not impose the registration of self-employed workers or individual firms for specific professions in construction, but small-scale construction firms are informal and unstructured.

Furthermore, when building works are assigned to small-scale contractors, and not to structured engineering firms, it is the house owner or landowner who has the employer role and the responsibility for the security of the construction; he becomes the developer. For instance, if the owner decides to refurbish his house, and opts to assign the execution of that work to a small-scale (sub)contractor, it is the very owner the one who has to pay the social contributions for all workers; he is also responsible for security issues. However, builders who work under the small-scale contractor do not negotiate wages and terms with the owner of the house, but with the small-scale contractor. Working arrangements between (sub)contractors (small-scale contractors) and employees are agreed verbally on a project-to-project basis; nor written contract neither stable working arrangements exist between the two parts. Finally, according to the Greek legislation, builders can be hired only on a daily basis, whereas social benefits to workers (for instance the Christmas benefit) are paid by the Social Insurance Fund. Money for social allowances is deducted from the (various) employers of each worker employer in a calendar year.

Finally, it should be clear that the permit issued by the Office of Licences (*πολεοδομία*) for building works constitutes the fundamental condition for the existence of declared employment. If the landowner, for instance, does not declare to the local authority the building works, he cannot become the employer; no social contributions can be paid to the Social Insurance Fund. When the owner declares the type of work, the local urban planning authority defines the minimum number of days of work needed for the execution of that specific work. To make clearer the dependence of formal employment in residential construction on building permits for a building work, I take as an example the construction of a new building.

The new house under construction will be 100m² (for simplification reasons this new house is to be built with no other spaces such as parking, garden, basement). I calculate the minimum days of work (eight-hour work) for the construction of this house (www.ergatika.gr), and it results that for the completion of this house are needed, at least, 135 working days for different tasks (41 for excavation, 20 for masonry, 30 for plastering, 22 for flooring, 15 for painting, 8 for other works). It is noted that the one working day for instance does not correspond to one calendar day, rather to 8 hours of work that can be assigned to different workers. One day of work corresponds to one welfare stamp (daily social contribution). *“To start the construction of the that house, the developer (responsible of the works) is obliged to demand the issue of the permit for the specific building work by the local authorities and to advance part of builders’ contributions to IKA (Social Security Fund, IKA-ETAM). The contributions to IKA for this specific project are to be paid by the developer who can be either the landowner or the owner of a construction firm, provided that the latter is registered with the Chamber of Commerce. In case that a unregistered small contractor takes over the construction of the house, it is the owner of the land the one who has to pay the contributions for all workers to IKA; the owner becomes the formal employer. As for the payments for the execution of works, the land owner usually pays the small contractor whom he concluded the agreement with, and it is the latter who pays the workers of his team, according to their oral agreements (Trade Unionist, 12/7/2016, Athens).*

It is therefore obvious that in case the developer does not apply for a building permit, it cannot result any working arrangement for building works between employer and employee; declared employment cannot incur. In the case also that more working days are needed to finish specific building works than initially foreseen by the local authority, extra days should be declared and paid to the Social Security Fund; if not, employees’ insurance and formal employment cannot be provided in any other way.

4.5 The findings

In this section, I use empirical material from all categories that have been interviewed (migrants, labour inspectorates, trade unionists, key informants) to answer to the research questions. Three general categories of informal work are analysed in the next paragraphs: (1) the under-declared employment; (2) the totally undeclared employment; and, (3) informal workers with bogus or false status. In each category, many subcategories of informal working arrangements permit more nuanced understandings. The section closes paying attention to the relation between the prevalence and the nature of informal employment with non-EU migrants’ practices to renew their stay permit.

4.5.1 Under-declared employment

This first category of informal employment usually refers to declared employees who receive a part of the salary on the basis of what it is written in the formal contract, and an additional amount of money cash in hand (envelope payment), according to a verbal agreement (Williams and Nadin, 2012, p. 200). In other words, under-declared employment characterizes the remuneration of an officially registered employee who receives two wages, a declared one and a supplementary undeclared wage. In the next paragraphs, I analyse three sub-categories of this form: (a) the undeclared overtime pay that concern a remuneration for overtime work, (b) full-time workers with part-time contracts, and (c) the falsification of workers' level of expertise to avoid social contributions.

Undeclared overtime pay

To start with, under-declared employment is a common form of informality encountered in both countries. This refers to workers who receive an additional remuneration cash-in-hand; envelope wage payments supplementary to their licit wage from insured work. It seems that envelope wages are used to pay builders' overtime work, even if they are full-time workers. This practice seems to be widespread, due to the absolute terms in which the respondents are expressed: "the extra hours are not declared" or "there is no question". This pattern occurs both in the Italian and Greek construction industry. Three respondents recount:

The extra hours are not declared. When there was much work to do, I was used to work 60 overtime hours per month. I was paid for it, but there was nothing written in the payroll (Luftar, aged 45, Milan).

~

You are paid, for instance, for 160 hours; ten euro per hour. Your monthly wage is 1600 euro. If you work 200 hours, your boss gives you one cheque of 1600 euro, and another one of 400 euro. [...] it's not in the employer's interest to declare extra work in your salary slip; but it's not in builders' interest either. The hourly wage cost (the amount the employer has to pay for each working hour) is about 24 euro, and the builder takes 8-9 euro. If he offers you from 10 to 12 euro per overtime hour worked, both save money. Because if they declare everything, you have to pay more taxes (Gezim, aged 51, Milan).

~

[...] there is no question of overtime hours: it makes part of the oral agreement; nothing is declared (written in the contract) (Mentor, aged 37, Athens)

As regards workers' incentives in receiving envelope wages for overtime, it seems quite clear that the net profit incentivises workers to accept such an offer. In this case, therefore, it can be assumed that not declared overtime generates a reciprocal profit for both workers and employers who save money. Due to high taxes and state interferences, the agreement on the "under-the-table" wage occurs in cooperation with the worker, since hiding the additional part of the fee from the official authorities is in both parts' interest. A Trade Union officer verifies that "under-the-table" payments maximise both sides' profit, since the employer evades extra social contributions, while the worker does not comply with his tax obligations:

In Italy, another problem remains the tax wedge on labour. If the worker takes 100 euro of net retribution, the cost for the company is 220 euro, if added all other expenses (social contributions, insurance). It is therefore obvious that a worker can say to his employer to pay him 150 cash-in-hand instead of 220; the immediate increase of worker's salary is of 50%! (Trade Unionist, 19/5/2015, Milan).

Undeclared overtime pay is a pattern that enables both employers and migrants to maximise their profit. Since migrant workers are insured, they see no reason to declare overtime work to the authorities. This money is definitely an extra source of income during the economic crisis. Even if overtime work is nowhere declared, migrants expect that they will be paid, since 'there's trust'. The two respondents below verify that mutual trust constitutes the guarantee against malfeasance.

ID: how are you sure you will be paid?

L: there's trust. If he doesn't know you, he won't make you work. (Lavdrim, aged 29, Milan).

~

[...] the last company for which I worked for three months paid me the overtime regularly; declared in the wage slip. [...] then when I saw the difference it was up to 50% less than what I was used to be paid for undeclared overtime. [...] if I had remained more time with them, they would have proposed a trick to evade extra costs. Indeed, they didn't propose it immediately, neither I asked for. (Key Informant - Italian builder, 19/4/2016, Milan)

Indeed, agreement on payments of overtime work may proceed only when actors know each other. When one of the two parts cannot be sure that the agreement is to be honoured, or that the worker will not report the informal practice to authorities, such an economic transaction may be executed formally. However, it cannot be taken for granted that overtime work is always remunerated. Many of my respondents recounted that overtime work may be not paid. In the Greek case, it seems that daily working hours increased by one, without leading to any salary increase. On the

contrary, all of my respondents in Athens have admitted that the daily wage per employee decreased from 50-70 euro to 25-40 euro. Workers not only work eight instead of seven hours as they were used to do before the crisis, but they are usually not paid for overtime work.

The working time was from 7.30am to 2.30pm. Now, they (employers) ask you “stay a little bit more.. we have to finish... just for one more hour”. Now, we try to get paid to according to the hours worked. (Milot, aged 41, Athens)

~

Now, the working hours are more. It was used to be from 7 or 7.30 to 2.30. Now, they (employers) ask you to stay more, but you are not paid (for the extra hours). (Muzafer, aged 42, Athens)

Maroukis (2010) argued that builders' wages were set per square meter (piecework) and not per day. According to my interviewees, it does not seem to be the case anymore. Migrant builders are paid a daily (or even weekly) salary for 8 hours of work per day. However, many times they have to work overtime, but extra hours seem not to be always remunerated. Workers may negotiate the payment for overtime work, although they are not always paid for it. In the case of Milot, it seems that request for the remuneration of overtime work may be a collective practice by the group of other fellow nationals he works with. However, negotiating power seems to weaken due to the fear of lapsing into irregularity. Muzafer, one colleague of him, related that “you are not paid” for overtime work. Azem, another colleague of Milot, confirms what Muzafer stated.

Even if I could not confirm whether Milot, who possesses a ten-year stay permit, is paid or not the overtime work, I might assume that Muzafer and Azem are not able to demand to be paid for extra hours, since their stay permits are to expire. As Azem explained me, they feel even afraid of complaining to their employers about late payments. In this respect, Perrotta (2011) argued that having a formal contract and a regular migrant status permitted Romanian builders to have a better bargaining power with respect to their colleagues with an irregular status. Consequently, it can be assumed that migrants who run the risk of becoming once again irregular are constrained to accept to work informally and not paid for longer hours.

Get paid for undeclared overtime work constitutes a strategic option for migrant workers. Migrants with a (long-term) regular status seem to be able to negotiate payments on overtime work, and benefit from this type of under-declared employment. Their power derives from the fact that overtime work is indispensable for the execution and the completion of the works. It can be assumed that it is more relevant for skilled workers who are found in a better position than less skilled colleagues, since employers could not risk replacing competent workforce at later stages of a project. Skilled workers are able to comprehend the need for overtime work, and negotiate

overtime payments with their employer. Even if a building site cannot be “*circumscribed as proper*” (De Certeau, 1984), migrants builders may know that their overtime labour is important for the proper functioning of building projects, that is their contribution is indispensable. All these features may characterise *dynamic migrants* who have a high level of skills and social capital. *Dynamic* builders are able to negotiate better payments for overtime work, and not hesitate to ask to be paid cash-in-hand. In this case, their involvement in this type of employment may be characterized as a form of agency.

On the other hand, not get paid (or be underpaid) for overtime work seems to be very relevant to the immigrant status. Irregular migrant workers or those whose stay permit is due to expire may not insist on being paid for overtime work, because they would be less inclined to create tensions during a period of high unemployment rates. Their involvement in this type of informality may be unwitting, and its benefits depend on employers’ good intention, that is it is rather causal whether they are paid or not. It is also interesting to note that the extreme majority of my interviewees in Athens do not prefer work extra hours. It is true that they were used to work for 7 hours per day, and any overtime work may mean further deterioration of working conditions, in that they are not paid for extra working hours. These attributes may characterise *entrapped* and *expectant* migrants who would avoid negotiating with their employer for such financial issues. For both categories, low levels of capital and the likelihood to endanger household’s income force them to accept passively the terms set by employers. In some cases, though, *expectant* migrants achieve to negotiate payment for extra hours and receive part of what they are owed. In this case, the practice may be characterized as *tactical*.

Extended part-time contracts

Analysing and explaining the nature and prevalence of informal economy, many scholars have argued that the informalisation of economy in Western welfare states is the result of the concessions of the state to the capital (Slavnic, 2010). In particular, instead of guaranteeing workers’ rights, modern western states made a series of concessions to big companies in the sake of capital demands for more flexible human resources. Leading capitalists, from their side, developed strategies to avoid standard working arrangements by exerting constant pressure to governments – and ultimately achieved – to legislate in favour of non-standard forms of employment (see for instance part-time or project employment). Neoliberal legislative initiatives allow no intervention to current trend of out-sourcing, the dilution of the principle of subordination concerning the employment contract (Supiot, 2001), or the lift of the restrictions

about self-employment. According to structuralists, these concessions result in further deregulation of the labour market and generate further informality, undeclared work and precarity.

What it is important to mention is that from early 1990s, and, even more acutely, from the outset of the crisis in Southern Europe, a series of reforms have been implemented in both Italian and Greek labour market in order to increment competitiveness and favour innovation (Pedersini and Regini, 2013). By creating a flexible labour market, where firms operate under fewer regulation, flexible working arrangements generated also precarity in many economic sectors, one example being construction. However, it must be borne in mind that in both countries informal employment has been widespread also due to small and medium sized companies functioning that derived benefits from informalisation of work.

In Italy, deregulation of the labour market achieved with the promotion of non-typical contracts through the legislative schemes “Treu Pachet” of 1997, “Biagi Reform” of 2003, and the “Fornero Reform” of 2012. Part-time employment was definitely one of the 48 atypical forms that generate flexibilization in the Italian labour market (Rymkevich, 2013). These laws enforced also employers’ legacy to fire workers without invoking any explicit reasons. In Italy, the percentage of part-time job contracts increased from 13,5 % in 2000 to 17,4% in 2010, and the figure of involuntary part-timers almost doubled (from 17% to 32%, OECD, 2014).

Concerning the Greek labour market, the first bail-out agreement between the Greek government and its creditors triggered further deregulation in the labour market (Kouzis, 2012). The establishment of a new mechanism for the government to set minimum wages, rather than leave it just to the negotiation of social partners through the National General Collective Employment Agreement (EGSSE), and the existence of the arbitration procedure regarding the collective bargaining system only in a voluntary base (Georgiadou, 2015) enabled extremely flexible working arrangements. According to INE-GSEE (2013), since 2010 almost two thirds of the contracts signed in Greece are fixed-term or/and part-time²⁹, whereas almost half of workers signed a part-time contract involuntary (INE-GSEE, 2011, p.241).

Construction industry has not been immune to these changes. New forms of job contracts have been introduced within the construction sector such as fix-term and part-time contracts, apprenticeship or vocational training contract, intermittent or occasional accessory employment (Ministero del lavoro e delle politiche sociali, 2012). Concerning the job contracts in residential construction in Greece, no change occurred regarding the nature of contracts, rather austerity

²⁹ Part-time contracts in Greece were introduced in 1990, but they are not used in residential construction, where workers are employed on a daily basis.

measures led to wage and social allowances cuts. As introduced before, working arrangements are not based on contracts, but labour time corresponds to the working days the worker is insured for each single building work. This peculiarity is explained in the words of a labour inspector:

In residential construction, undeclared employment has a different sense than in all other economic sectors, because it is not provided hiring employees by a unique, stable employer. We cannot say that the worker was detected working more hours than it has been defined in a part-time contract, because even if he works for just one hour a day, he has to be insured for the whole day. This happens because it is impossible to control how long a specific task takes. (Labour Inspector, 27/7/2016, Athens)

Even though part-time contracts did not affect industrial relations in Greek residential construction, a common trend among Italian employers that generates informality has been to hire workers with a part-time job contract, but to employ them informally as full-time workers. In this case, workers are declared only for half of the working hours they are really employed. Salary for the working hours not laid down in the job contract is paid cash-in-hand. Social provisions beyond what is declared in the contract are not provided. Taking into consideration the first trade union's narration about how this part-time contract may not be in accordance with the nature of the tasks in a building site, it is evident that part-time jobs in the construction can be conducive to the existence of undeclared work.

Some illicit practices we encounter during inspections concern part-time employees who work as full-timers in an evasive way. (Labour Inspector, 13/5/2015, Milan)

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Some years ago, a further harm (for the construction sector) was the possibility to hire part-time workers. For some workers (in other sectors), it was a good choice, since they could work less hours. [...] but for those who do know how the sector works, this change was a way to pay a part of the salary cash-in-hand, informally. But, is it possible that the builder who prepares the cement mortar to work only 4 hours and then to leave? (said in an ironic way) (Trade Unionist, 7/4/2016, Milan)

~

There is another category of workers in grey economy that means employees insured as part time workers, but working full-time; it's really risky for employers not to insure at all their workers. In this way, the cost for this specific worker is almost cut in half. [...] in case of any inspections, they (employers) are shown to be law-abiding in any way. (Trade Unionist, 21/2/2016, Milan)

From employers' side, the growing share of under-declared workers in part-time employment in residential construction may be interpreted as the result of the economic recession, and the continuous effort of employers to avoid costs. However, statistics in Table 4.1 show that part-time contracts are in constant decline since 2008, either as an absolute number or a percentage of total number of workers. It might be assumed thus that instead of using part-time contracts, Italian employers opt to use other atypical forms of contracts (not to say relying on totally undeclared workers) that implicate lower costs to authorities, as I demonstrate in the next paragraphs;

Table 4.1 – Part-time contracts and Total number of workers per year registered in the Social Fund (Cassa Edile) of Milan, Lodi, Monza and Brianza

<i>Year</i>	<i>Part-time workers</i>	<i>Total number of workers</i>	<i>% Part-timers of Total</i>
2008	3.949	47.575	8,30%
2009	2.956	43.804	6,75%
2010	2.068	40.361	5,12%
2011	900	37.968	2,37%
2012	693	34.594	2,00%
2013	548	31.224	1,76%
2014	522	29.249	1,78%
2015	540	26.111	2,07%

Source: Elaboration of data available at: <http://ww2.cassaedilemilano.it/>

On the other hand, employees' engagement in informal economy is a kind of survival practice within extremely competitive markets. The crisis have put out of work thousands of migrants and created oversupply of migrant labour in local labour markets. Being under-declared with a part-time job may be considered as an adjustment of migrant workers through which are able to get by, because, otherwise, they would be unemployed. The uncertainty and the insecurity of their working lives justify the notion of this form as a practice undertaken out of necessity, in the absence of other means of livelihood.

Isuf has remained unemployed since 2011, and he said that he has worked at times as part-timer. Working as part-timer may be considered as a "favour" for workers, since "*nobody hires you formally*". According to him, casual employment opportunities in construction do not permit the existence of full-time contracts. Isuf seems to justify employers who do not declare their employees, because they have to pay high taxes. At times, part-time contracts may even have the character of gift for those who need to renew their stay permit.

[...] if you don't find work, you have to go (to work undeclared)! What can you do, if you don't have enough to eat? If he (employer) needs you for 2 or 3 days, he doesn't hire you. You finish what you're supposed to do, and that's all. Nobody hires you formally. [...] it's difficult also for them (employers), because there are a lot of taxes to pay. They don't make it when you work black; imagine when they have to pay taxes!

ID: and what about those who need to renew their stay permit? How do they make it?

They (employers) may employ you for four hours a day. If you really are in need of! They may make you a favour. (Isuf, aged 39, Milan)

From the above narration, it can be said that part-time contracts may be the vehicle of regularisation for non-EU citizens. Albanians who need the proofs to renew their stay permit may ask a “favour” from their employer to hire them as part-timers. Migrant workers who have the capacity to mobilise their resources to be declared as part-time workers, may derive benefit of this type of contract. In other words, migrants’ social capital may result in gifts “*since they are not expected to be repaid by a certain amount of money or other valuables in a given period of time*” (Portes, 1995, p.12).

Migrants’ engagement in this type of informality may be seen as a forced practice when the worker is a full-time employee, but is declared as part-timer. As such, it is a *survival* practice and the subject has to accept the conditions proposed in order to have an income. However, it can be characterised as a *tactic* for those actors who need to renew their stay permit. Migrant workers totally off-the-books may ask to be employed with a part-time job contract, in order to renew their stay permit. It seems to be an alternative solution to continue residing with regular documents; otherwise, migrants could seek to renew their stay permit by paying illicit mediators. Hence, this *tactic* entails what De Certeau (1984, p.xix) calls “hunter’s cunning” or “joyful discoveries”, in the sense the “weak” (migrant in need to renew the stay permit) may find the ways to beat the “strong” (the state or policy-makers).

Another form of informal work that comes under precarious contract connected to deregulation of labour market, is the distorted use of the apprenticeship and vocational training contracts. From a legalist point of view, Ales and Faioli (2009) refer to this form of informal work as a form of elusion and distorted use of the articles of apprenticeship. However, no indications for this form have been emerged from data collected in Milan.

Mismatch between the degree of specialisation and the employment status

Under-declared employment regarding job contract terms of construction workers may also result from the mismatch between the degree of specialisation/experience and the status of the employment as defined in the contract or in the payroll. In the Italian case, there are three levels of specialisation: 1) qualified manual worker (manovale specializzato), 2) qualified labourer (operaio qualificato), 3) specialised labourer (operaio specializzato). In the Greek construction sector³⁰, there are also three levels of specialisation: 1) unskilled worker (ανειδίκευτος εργάτης), 2) technician (mason) helper and specialised (skilled) worker (βοηθός τεχνίτη και ειδικευμένος εργάτης), 3) technician (skilled mason) (τεχνίτης).

However, as it results from the following quotes, migrant construction workers may have to accept contract terms not in accordance with their real specialization level or experience. Two respondents explain:

I work in this building site as a qualified labourer, but I am a specialised labourer. Look here (he shows me his professional card): it's written: I'm a specialized labourer (in Italian: muratore finito). Why am I paid as a qualified labourer? And, when the controls arrive, why they don't control this stuff? [...] trade unionists do nothing about this! (Enver, aged 29, Milan)

~

What happened with the triennials (of working experience)? In January, you could be declared as a technician with 7 triennials, and the next month, you worked for another employer and you were declared as a technician with 5 triennials. There was no control! They (employers) certainly paid less for your contributions. (Arbnor, aged 41, Athens)

Falsifying workers' level of expertise and/or years of experience is another pattern of informal employment. By employing this pattern, there is nothing apparently illegal. Employers pay less for workers' contributions or salaries and save money. The present form of informality is yet a further example of coexistence of formal and informal work. As argued before in the case of precarious working arrangements and de-regulation in the Greek economy, the mismatch between workers' expertise or experience level and their salary slips implies the involuntary acceptance of lower declared wages and reduced pension rights. It can be considered an involuntary choice, since negotiating on the level of experience that is declared to authorities could cause problems

³⁰ It is also provided that every three years of additional experience within each level of specialisation builders' remuneration grows in Greece (Collective Agreement, 2009).

to workers who feel unprotected from institutional mechanisms. A Greek builder and an Italian Trade Unionist claim that inspectorates neglect this aspect of informality:

Some years ago, they (Social Security Fund – Inspectorate) said that they didn't have the possibility to control what it's declared in the wage slip and how many triennials (of experience) a worker has. Now, they have the way of controlling everything through electronic systems, but actually they don't. In the last pay slip I receive, I was declared to have three triennials of experience; actually, I have more than 7 (laughs)! (Key informant - Greek builder, 22/12/2015, Athens)

~

[...] for many years in our sector 70% of the workforce were manual workers; it was only a small percentage of the workers declared as specialised labourers. Was Milan built by only manual workers? It's obvious that manual workers cost less. (Trade Unionist, 7/4/2016, Milan)

As introduced before, inefficiency of control mechanisms is one of the causes that justify the prevalence of informal work (Reyneri, 2001; Ambrosini, 2011). However, tolerance of inspectorates is another factor that feeds informality. Although Greece has stepped up its measures against this form of informality, it seems labour inspectorates continue to tolerate it; in Italy alike. The vast majority also of migrants consider trade unions' action scanty as Enver related "*trade unionists do nothing*"! This kind of inertia contributes to the dominance of informal working arrangements and generates further distrust between formal and informal institutions (Williams and Horodnic, 2015; Williams *et al.*, 2015). In the case of Albanians this mistrust towards institutions may be justified both from their older and recent experiences: their experience in Hoxha's regime has generated an aversion against state institutions and trade unions' roles, whereas both Italian and Greek states' migration policies have usually constrained their prosperity.

However, beyond the inefficiency of inspectorates' controls, it can be said that this kind of engagement in informal agreements depends also on workers' position within a specific network. In this respect, Perrotta (2011) has argued that the mismatch between the degree of specialisation and the employment status may be contingent to the unbalance between foreman and workers. In my case study, it seems that that finding may be confirmed by taking into consideration Edon's working situation. Edon is foreman in building sites, and he is declared to the authorities and paid according to his level of expertise. On the contrary, Enver does not seem to have any special position within the company he works. He does not even socialize very much with his colleagues, since he likes "*to do my work and go home*". In this

case, Enver could not have the possibility to make part of a possible collective bargaining between workers and employer. In this regard, Perrotta (2011) argued that collective group bargaining power could result in acknowledgment of workers' level of expertise by the employer. Hence, individualization of work progress may reduce the capacity of individuals to avoid informal working arrangements in construction.

Therefore, it can be argued that this type of informality cannot bring benefits to the employees. Being engaged in such form of employment is rather inevitable for the vast majority of migrant workers. By falsifying workers' level of expertise, employers may save costs, whereas migrants' loss is linked to less social benefits and pension rights. Both *entrapped* and *expectant* migrants have no power to negotiate such an arrangement, and only powerful *dynamic* migrants may be in position to avoid it.

4.5.2 Totally undeclared employment

Another category identified in this study is composed of workers who are employed without any form of contract; undeclared and uninsured. Many respondents themselves have admitted that they work undeclared in construction either in a continuous, or in an occasional way in Italy and Greece. Yet, it does not concern only migrant builders without stay permit and the permission to work, but even those with long-term stay permit or having obtained the Italian/Greek citizenship. In this section, I identify five sub-categories of informal migrant workers: a) regular, b) moonlighters, c) irregular, d) "unemployed", and, e) those who provide services without aiming always to earn monetary income.

Undeclared regular migrant workers

This sub-category refers to firms that employ documented migrant workers on a fulltime or occasional basis without declaring them to the official authorities. Avni, at the moment of the interview, is an undeclared documented migrant worker, even if he would like to be declared. At a first glance, accepting an uninsured job seems to be a forced practice in order to avoid ending up unemployed.

[...] before I start to work for this employer, I have been told that I would be insured, but there are no welfare stamps for me. I work in black (economy). Where to go? There are

no jobs. I have to accept it, haven't I? Would it better to call you to ask 5 euro to buy milk for my children? [...] fortunately, my woman work. But, you cannot stay at home and expect everything from the women (Avni, aged 34, Athens)

Because of economic crisis, many migrants are obliged to accept to work uninsured, rather than ending up unemployed. The high rates of unemployment within the construction industry have restricted migrants' capacity to negotiate contract terms. Migrants with families seem to be more likely to accept to work uninsured, since they have to maintain their household. Even when woman undertakes the role of main breadwinner (Chapter 5), Albanian males cannot “*expect everything*” from their wives, as the masculinities of male independent breadwinners may be wounded (Van Boeschoten, 2015). A similar finding has been showed in Vianello and Sacchetto's work (2016) on migrants' non-economic subjective motivations for participation in informal economy. The authors (2016, p.313) argue that accepting informal job opportunities may be the result of male's willing “to meet gender conventions and expectations... to defend his honour”. In that case study, migrants' values seem to derive from values connected to Muslim traditions.

However, as a direct result of the low demand for workforce, migrants who work in an occasional way may opt to work informally without caring about their insurance. Leonard (2000) has argued that both employers and workers in construction has turned to informal economic arrangements in order to enhance their household economic stability. Maximising the income may constitute rather a voluntary choice for migrants who hardly make ends meet:

F: A few days ago, I paid a worker who hadn't worked for months. I asked him how much money he wanted for that day, and he said me 40 euro. I gave him 50 euro, because he was very good. He hugged me, kissed me and said me “thanks a lot”.

ID: had he asked you to be insured for that day?

F: [...] he goes to work only for that day, to take the money; he doesn't care to be insured. In each and every case. he cannot renew the health card. By working once a month, he cannot obtain 50 daily social contributions needed to renew it. He isn't done with one welfare stamp per week or per month. He doesn't care for his insurance; maybe he achieves to do it under his wife's job. He needs the money. Black money everywhere! (Fatlum, aged 35, Athens)

In this particularly telling example, the worker seems to work uninsured not only to receive a higher payment, but due to the disdain for formal employment. Casual work seems to be very common for migrant construction workers, especially in Greece. Since few days of formal employment cannot guarantee any kind of social benefits, workers may opt to work informally

considering unworthy being declared. From the above-mentioned case and the following quotations, it is also confirmed what Kapsalis (2015) argues about the involvement of workers in informal employment. Due to austerity measures in Greece in the last years, the increased taxation for salaried staff provides a disincentive for employers to abide by labour legislation. A similar view has been argued by Leonard (2000) for the case of Northern Irish construction industry. The author claimed that austerity measures and capital's demand for flexible workforce “*create vulnerable forms of labour willing to work informally*” (2000, p.1079). In the meanwhile, welfare system restructuring creates uncertainty for workers' possibility of receiving a pension in the future. Under these circumstances, engagement in informal work constitutes a practice in order to secure better earnings.

ID: but what about the pension? Will you be able to fulfil the requirements to receive a pension?

V: What pension? I don't believe it will come the time we receive a pension. I don't know anyone (Albanian) who receives a pension. [...] I started being insured in at an advanced age here in Greece. I have no idea if I take a pension. I will have the one from Albania that is about 200 euro per month; maybe I'll receive a small amount of money from Greece. (Valmir, aged 56, Athens).

According to Feige (1997, p. 22), “when formal and informal institutions clash, non-compliant behaviours proliferate”. Lack of trust in the probability to receive a pension from the Greek or Italian state constitutes an institutional “incongruence” (Williams *et al.*, 2015). The non-alignment between the codified laws of Greek and Italian states and the beliefs of their populations on the difficulty of acknowledging past pension contributions may constitute a significant factor that triggers the existence and prevalence of informal employment. In this case, the lack of perspective of pension being established to migrants may constitute a disincentive to work formally, especially for those who left Albania in a young age, or those under fifty years old who think retirement is very far in the future.

As I'm getting older, things will worsen for us. We will not have a pension. Where is the pension? What will I do in my sixties? Will my children be close to me? They may tell me to fuck off. Many times, I think of my father, as my brother does, we are of such a nature (we share such values), we were born like this (Artan, aged 43, Milan)

~

It's becoming harder and harder. We continue to pay taxes and contributions for the pension, but I don't know what will happen; here, nobody knows what can happen. [...]

in Albania, we have a long tradition: I have maintained my parents; I hope my son does so (if he does not receive the pension) (Isuf, aged 46, Milan)

In Artan and Isuf's telling examples, it can be clearly seen also how economic relationships can be deeply embedded in social relationships, norms and beliefs (Polanyi, 1957). Family links shape migrants' economic actions. Albanian builders' expectation to be supported by their children when they will not be able to work is built up on values and norms that characterize traditional societies. Albanian community has been based on patriarchal values and family has always been a central institution in Albanian society, notwithstanding the influences by former Soviet and Chinese regime (Vathi, 2015). Albanian males have usually supported their families and elderly parents staying back in Albania by sending financial remittances that has been usually perceived as an obligation by many migrants (Smith, 2009; Vathi, 2015). Since remittances have been usually sent by male migrants (Smith, 2009), and due to the central role of males in Albanian society, Isuf expects to be supported by his son, and not by the other two female children. On the other hand, Artan is worried about his children, because second generation children may not maintain the values that characterize Albanian society. They have grown up in and are part of Western societies in which such values are absent. Hence, when these cultural beliefs on children's obligation to assist their parents couples with distrust vis-à-vis society's formal institutions, engagement in informal economic activities may incur.

Furthermore, this form of undeclared work is connected with neo-liberalist scholars' interpretation of the participation in undeclared economic activities out of choice. In this case, migrant workers may act as rational social actors who assess the benefits and loss of participating in undeclared economy (see for instance Grabiner, 2000; Hasseldine and Zhuhong, 1999; Ambrosini, 2011). The following quotes confirm such an assumption. Occasional work and extra work during weekends can also be an additional income for migrants for which they do not seek to be insured. As analysed in Chapter 3, working as off-the-books own-account worker depends largely on agents' social capital. Edon has developed such a social capital so that he is able to work informally during the weekends either as dependent or as wholly off-the-books own-account worker. His linguistic and communication skills has enabled him to create a network of clients and to work informally to supplement his household income.

Usually during the weekends, I work "in black", both for other artisans or for myself. Thanks to other works I made in the past, I left my phone number to people who now call me to have their house painted. (Edon, aged 40, Milan)

Wholly off-the-books own-account workers' category includes employees who work informally on their own behalf (ILO, 2004). Off-the-books own-account workers are employed without being

registered with the official authorities and receive an income which is not declared. This kind of self-employed workers may employ a team of other workers who in turn work without being declared and insured. This is the case of many workers both in Italy and Greece who work as off-the-books independent workers in a continuous or in a more occasional way. This practice is seen as a way to increase income and avoid taxes. In the Greek context, this practice is omnipresent, since it is not provided the existence of small-scale individual firms in residential construction. Low- (or no) capital and unstructured organization of firms permit to hire a team of workers for the duration of a specific building project. This group may disband after the completion of the works or may continue to work together on another building project. Small-scale contractors have not to register with the official authorities, but they have only to issue invoices. Two Greek small-scale contractors describe the way they work:

What I do the last years is to ensure the 50 welfare stamps that are necessary for the issuing of my health insurance card. As for the rest of works I do, it's not in my interest to be declared. (Valmir, aged 56, Athens).

~

I've never liked to work for others (as dependent worker)... I like running after money; black money, how to say... if the owner cannot (pay for my insurance) I work uninsured for some more money. I cannot work for 20-25€. (Albion, aged 41, Athens).

It can be argued therefore that working as an off-the-books own-account worker mainly concern not marginalized individuals, but those with more resources (“reinforcement” or “exit” theory). This choice is usually the result of economic rationale, as both above respondents’ recounts reveal. Having calculated the minimum of daily social contributions they need to acquire the health card, regular immigrants who work as small-scale own-account workers may opt to work informally to evade taxes.

Under these circumstances, undertaking informal economic activities by construction migrant workers can be considered as “ad hoc” responses to their economic situation (Clarke, 1999), or the only practice in response to low demand for workforce in construction and due to the lack of viable alternatives. This practice may be essential for those risking to lapse into irregularity. Migrants who have also families may be in a worse off position, since they have to maintain a whole family. In this case, *entrapped* or *expectant* migrants may be involved in such informal *survival* practices out of necessity.

On the other hand, independently from the different profiles proposed in this thesis (*dynamic*, *expectant*, *entrapped*), working as undeclared worker may be a *tactic* to increment the income. Due to the uncertainty and suspicion on the likelihood to receive a pension, migrants may treat

with contempt the benefits of declared employment. Their objective is to gain more money during a period in which welfare systems' efficiency are under question.

Last but not least, working off the books seems to be a *strategic* option for those who carry out activities in construction as not-registered own-account workers. These actors seem to have the capacity to navigate the labour market with autonomy, in the sense that they may decide how many days they have to work as declared workers (in the Greek case). In both countries, enforced trust and reciprocal benefits between client and small-scale own account worker permit the execution of works without any license that implicates profit maximization. In this case, it might be assumed that *expectant* or *dynamic* migrants who have already acquired long-term stay permits or achieve to renew their documents through their wives' employment is more likely to opt to work not insured at all. In this way, they can ensure theirs and their family's health insurance.

Before moving to other types of informal work, it is useful to show the interplay between the demand side and migrants' engagement in undeclared employment.

The demand side

The institutional incongruence thesis seeks to explore workers' engagement in informal employment, analysing the demand for undeclared work from the recipient of the services. In their report on the nature and prevalence of informal work in Greece (ILO, 2016), Williams and colleagues state that it is not only the employers' side that forces employees to work informally, but also clients' demand is another crucial factor that generates informality. The authors argue that when considering either the causes of undeclared economy or policies for tackling it, it should be taken into consideration the demand-side, that is citizens' propensity to obtain goods and services in the undeclared economy. In the same report, according to the 2013 Eurobarometer survey, there is an increased demand for undeclared services when related to home repairs and renovation works. Indeed, many respondents maintained that their participation in undeclared work is due to clients' demand.

[...] when for example I made an estimate for the painting of an entire building assessing taxes and social contributions due, the tenants had decided not to issue any kind of license in order to save money. How could I work declared? (Pellumb, aged 48, Athens).

~

I have created a cleaning service company with another partner to support my family and to ensure our health insurance. Money from construction is extra 'black' money. I have been asked to refurbish a house in [name of municipality]. [...] there is no license, there are no welfare stamps. If you go to make an offer to a client (to estimate the cost of the

works), and you talk about legality (issue of the appropriate building permit), they (house owners) are laughing! “are you crazy, idiot?” they would ask you. (Fatlum, aged 35, Athens)

These quotes suggest how it is important to take into consideration the demand side to explain the prevalence of informal work. The rigid connection between the existence of building permit and the workers' insurance, in combination with the inexistence of registered structured firms operating in residential construction, may explain the prevalence of and undeclared work in Greek construction using the institutional incongruence lens. In the Italian case too, demand side may be of relevance when it comes for the issuing of invoices. Clients may prefer not to receive a receipt when they are to pay more.

They don't care! People don't ask you any receipt, when they know that they can pay less! Even 50 euro less (Liridon, aged 41, Milan)

The excerpts above constitute workers' representations of their engagement in informality as off-the-books own-account workers. To evaluate better the relation and the bargaining power of these individuals, it should be taken into account clients' representation of this phenomenon, that lack from my research. What I may only suppose is that some migrants are more able to negotiate the terms of the agreement with the client. The factors that determine the migrants' bargaining power are discussed in the conclusions section of this chapter.

Secondary or multiple jobholders

Existing literature argues that informal employment is higher for secondary jobholders than for employees with only one job (OECD, 2008; Anaglostopoulos *et al.* 2015). OECD (2008) reports that workers may not have much benefit of being declared for a second job, especially when there are limits on benefits for doing so. It is also the case both in the Italian and Greek labour market; within construction too.

A couple of interviewees recounted that employment in residential construction is undertaken as a secondary one, since they are insured by another employer. In this case, since a worker has obtained his insurance, he is not incentivized to reveal to official authorities the second job. As employment in construction has been extremely discontinuous, migrants who changed job may continue to maintain their social network to have access also to building sites.

Albanian workers who are kicked out of the formal construction sector may continue to work informally, from one side to maximise their revenues, and, from the other side, to maintain their social network, should the situation in construction improve. As showed also in Chapter 3, Fatlum who has started up a business in cleaning services continue to work informally in construction as off-the-books own account worker. He has never stopped to socialize with colleagues or engineers in Athens. Even if he remained unemployed for several months in construction, he maintained his social capital, and now he is able to undertake repairs in private houses. When needed, he is able to issue invoices for construction services through his acquaintances. His communication and language skills has permitted him to maintain contacts with native clients. Pellumb works in a supermarket. He is a painter and he may work in residential construction occasionally.

[...]I have created a cleaning service company with another partner to support my family and to ensure our health insurance. Money from construction is extra 'black' money. [...] at the moment, I have been assigned a renovation without any building permit. In case the client wants an invoice, I have no problem to issue an invoice; I do it through the engineers I have collaborated with in the past. (Fatlum, aged 35, Athens)

~

[...] When I'm asked to, I never say no; it happens I go to paint some houses or to do other minor works. I try to maintain my contacts, because maybe there will be work in construction in the future (Pellumb, aged 48, Athens).

The excerpts have shown how migrants' engagement in informal work is also the result of individuals' capacity to use their social and cultural capital. While for other migrant workers undeclared work entails the passive acceptance of working terms, moonlighters seem to dispose a greater ability to take advantage of the prevalence of informal working opportunities in construction to increase their income in hard times.

The case of Pellumb demonstrates that maintenance of social ties during recession might be a source of extra income in the sense that he is able to work occasionally in the construction sector as a moonlighter. The occasional character of this form of undeclared employment may constitute a *tactical* option for those construction workers who achieved to find another employment. It can be assumed that the decision to return to construction trades depend on the stability of the new employment and the upturn of construction activity. Hence, this can be a *tactic* undertaken by *expectant* migrants.

On the other hand, the case of Fatlum demonstrates how social actors with high level of financial, social and cultural capital may come back to the construction market from a "position of strength". At the time of the interview, he run two different economic activities: cleaning services and

informal construction work pertaining to housing renovation. After a couple of years in which he was underemployed, he decided to start up the cleaning service firm, but when construction activity slightly recovered, he did two different jobs. All these features advocate a *dynamic* worker who is able to motivate resources in an autonomous way.

Undeclared irregular migrants

As introduced in Chapter 1, there have been many Albanian migrants who opted to overstay their visas, and remain in the Italian or Greek territory without regular documents (Triandafyllidou and Ambrosini, 2011). From December 2010 onwards, this phenomenon has become more frequent, since Albanians have been allowed to enter and travel freely into Schengen area countries for a period not exceeding three months. Research on undocumented migrants has shown that migrants without documents rely on co-ethnic networks to find employment (Portes, 1995). In this respect, Thiel (2010) argues that in London's building sites nationality (or ethnicity) of migrant workers played a significant role when getting a job. The author stated that migrant employers opted to employ people outside their national (ethnic) group only when there were networked labour shortages, or network members did not possess plentiful skills or certificates.

As already said, Albanian irregular migrants have largely relied on their family and community networks to insert in the Italian and Greek labour market. This trend is present even today in both countries' construction, and may concern irregular Albanian builders who work temporarily in Italy or Greece. This is the case of Tariq's nephew who comes occasionally in Greece when there is a job opportunity in construction. Tariq's example can verify scholars assumptions on how socially expected durations of immigration shape migrants' practices; and, how social relationships shape economic transactions (Roberts, 1995). Albanian irregular migrants, who aim at temporary migration episodes, may take advantage of structural changes with regards to the free movement of Albanians within Schengen zone. Travelling for a short period and working in construction for little money can be considered a practice to increase their income. When Tariq undertakes a repair as off-the-books own-account worker, he is able to decide who works with him; and he opts to get his nephew work in Greece, notwithstanding the latter's irregular status. Tariq has been in Greece since 1992. As explained to me, he may be able to convince his client that employing an irregular migrant does not entail any risk. In this sense, time of stay, that is the relations that migrants have developed with locals (Maroukis *et al.*, 2011), may enable such patterns.

[...] when I am assigned a renovation for example, I call my nephew who lives in Albania and he comes for a couple of months. He has not legal documents, but for two months there is no problem. When the owner knows me, he can trust me (Tariq, aged 61, Athens)

Contrary to migrants with temporary ambitions for staying, there are those whose aspirations are oriented towards residing permanently in Italy or Greece, or in Van Meeteren terms (2010), those living in the receiving country with “settlement aspirations”. It has been generally argued that irregular migrants rely more on their networks of conationals than regular ones do (Bloch *et al.*, 2014; Bloch and McKay, 2016). It is even more relevant for new migrants who depend even more on social networks in order to settle and find employment in the country of destination (Bashi, 2007; Ambrosini, 2016). However, social ties with native people can be proved more efficient resources than those with community network, mainly in critical situations (McIlwaine, 2015; Ambrosini, 2016).

Living in Italy from 2006, Beqir is a plumber with irregular immigrant status. He failed to be regularised some years ago, because he was cheated by people who had promised to furnish him the legal documents in exchange for money. Beqir lives in Italy for 10 years now. At the beginning of his migration experience, he had followed a language course, and now his language skills are excellent. He has always socialized not only with Albanians, but also with migrants whatever their nationality and natives.

In the beginning I socialized with Albanian friends who had been here for years, and they spoke Italian. I started like this, and then I went to a school where to learn Italian... I used to go out with Italian friends, Moroccans, Tunisians... you have to speak Italian everywhere... you work with them, you go out with them... (Beqir, aged 27, Milan)

It has been argued that migrants’ capacity to mobilise resources and take benefit of bridging social networks may depend on cultural capital, that language skills and qualifications (Bourdieu, 1986; Ryan, 2008). Beqir’s bridging social ties allow him not only to work as dependent informal worker, but to undertake works as own-account worker by borrowing tools from Italian employers. It might be assumed that integrated Albanian migrants who reinforced their social and cultural capital might overcome barriers due to the irregularity of their status. It is also true that this capacity to mobilise resources is intrinsically connected with policy towards migration (Morris, 2003), and tolerance of civil society towards irregular migration (Ambrosini, 2015). Beqir lives in a satellite municipality of Milan ruled by pro-migrant authorities, and he does not have even the fear of deportation due to their immigrant status (Nash, 2009), as far as he does nothing but work honestly. In Beqir’s words:

B: My boss knows that I haven't documents, but he always calls me to work. I'm waiting for an amnesty... or I hope to have the documents when Albania joins EU. It is said that it will not take too long.

ID: don't you have any fear of being arrested if someone (authorities) asks your document?

B: Yes, but if you don't hurt anyone and you always work, I think there's no problem.

ID: [...] Have you bought any tools for your work?

B: No. For any personal work occurs, I borrow everything I need from my Italian friend (employer); even for a couple of weeks. (Beqir, aged 27, Milan)

With regard to this type of informal employment, I suggest that irregular migrants may be informally employed in residential construction out of necessity. Their irregular status is a structural constraint that cannot keep up with formal employment. Looking at both examples, it is true that informality in construction may allow irregular migrants to get by and increase their income. However, they have not the possibility to maintain a decisional autonomy, since they are constrained by their legal status. Even if migrants may integrate in the host society and develop social ties with native people, there is an asymmetry between them and their employers or clients, as long as they continue to be irregular.

“Unemployed” undeclared migrant workers

Another form of informality concerns those who receive state benefits, and are employed as undeclared workers in construction. This is the case of migrant builders who opt to work uninsured in order to maximize their income, while, at the same time, receiving unemployment benefits. This informal practice allows both employers and immigrants to maximize economic benefits from undeclared employment: employers pay less contributions, and migrant workers receive a double “salary”. This trend has been reported by several scholars who connected this kind of informality to causality of labour force in construction (Leonard, 2000). Concerning the Italian and Greek construction, this phenomenon has been analysed by Mingione in the early 1990s. This author (1990a, 1990b) highlighted the discontinuity in builders' contracts who opted to be employed for a minimum period out of choice to receive unemployment benefits.

An interesting example of this informal pattern emerged from Lavdrim's personal experience. Lavdrim had worked for many years in construction, but not in a continuous way. He had worked also as cook, whereas he sought to work also in factories. He did not

define himself as a builder, but he was eager to work at any sector. When he opted to work informally while receiving the unemployment benefit, he had a short-term work permit. When he was not receiving the unemployment subsidy anymore, he needed to have a formal contract in order to renew his stay permit. As he recounted, he had to “ask a favour” from his conational employer to offer him a new contract in order to maintain his regular status. The employer offered him the contract, but he made profit out of him, since he withheld part of his wage. It might assumed therefore that the practice of working while claiming welfare benefit entitlements, and the possibility to be formally hired again, once the period of receiving the benefits expire, depends on migrant builders’ expertise and legal status.

When I started working with that artisan I didn’t want to be hired, as I was taking unemployment benefits. Then, when allowance was over, I couldn’t do it to have a contract. (Lavdrim, aged 29, Milan).

In the Greek context, this form of informality regards also workers who opt to work informally to receive the special seasonal subsidy for builders (ειδικό εποχικό επίδομα). Key condition to receive this allowance is that the worker prove that he has worked at least 73 days and not more than 163 days within a calendar year; he possesses from 73 and up to 163 welfare stamps (OAED, 2017). Migrant workers may opt to be insured for less than 163 days in order to be granted the allowance.

I try to be insured for at least 73 working days and not more than 160, so I can take the yearly benefit for builders (Valmir, aged 56, Athens).

As already said, Valmir is part of a network of local employers and engineers. He is able to collect the necessary welfare stamps in order to receive the special seasonal subsidy. As it was the case of moonlighters before, social and cultural capital enhance the bargaining and negotiating power in construction. The mechanism through which Albanian migrants achieve to reach the threshold to apply for unemployment subsidies is described in the section about the commerce of welfare stamps later.

This form of informality could be a strategic option for those migrants whose legal status does not depend on any job contract anymore. In Italy, these workers may rationally calculate the benefits of receiving state subsidies and negotiate their working arrangement in a way that permit them to maximise their incomes. They should be considered *dynamic* actors who are able to request to be fired “on paper”, and be employed again once the period of state

benefit expires. In the Greek sector, this practice with migrants' capacity to collect welfare stamps by different employers that is developed in the next section.

(Un)paid informal work

Last but not least, gifts or in-kind favours can be considered a form of informal work. In recent studies, scholars have claimed that some of 55% of all informal employment was conducted to provide some service to friends, family members or acquaintances for little or no money (Williams and Round, 2008). Williams and colleagues shed also light on the prevalence of this form of informality in construction of EU countries, studying mostly self-employed workers (Williams and Nadin, 2012). The motivation for those involved in undeclared home maintenance and improvement work for relatives, friends, acquaintances and neighbours is embedded in familial and social networks not for financial gain, but for social and/or redistributive purposes (Williams *et al.*, 2011). At times, those works may be conducted to make a little money, but it depends of the closeness of the social relations involved (Williams and Round, 2008).

The present research reveals that (un)paid favours for closer social relations may take place also in residential construction by migrants in Italy and Greece. Many of the interviewees admitted that they work undeclared when their service is to be provided to friends and acquaintances. Fatlum's words are representative of what most of the respondents have recounted:

I work many times for cousins or friends. If they want to give me some money, it's fine. If not, they may offer me the dinner or to drink. Money do not have value between friends
(Fatum, aged 35, Athens)

In this respect, Vianello and Sacchetto (2016) claimed that informal work for family or community members and neighbours seem as a way to maintain and forge deeper social relations. In their research, some migrant workers opt to give services to their acquaintances as a favour for reasons connected with redistribution and sociality. In a previous research, Leonard (2000) pointed out that informal work was carried out for kinship and neighbours in certain types of localities and mainly during periods of economic recession. The author noted that, at times, informal work was not based on altruistic values, rather on self-interest, in the sense that people who could not reciprocate the service in the future were usually excluded from such transactions.

In my case studies, it cannot be assumed that unpaid informal work regards specific geographic locations, mainly in Milan where the sense of belonging to a neighbourhood may be considered absent. My respondents seem to be mainly motivated by the sense of obligation towards family

members and friends, rather than the need to forge deeper social relations (Vianello and Sacchetto, 2016), or as a way to get by during recession period. Familiar ties have been always of great importance for Albanians, and such activities do not seem to be driven by convenience or strategic planning. As such, this practice cannot be characterised neither strategic nor tactical, since it regards transactions of collective-community good.

4.5.3 Bogus working arrangements

In this section, informality concerns the falsification of contracts or distortion of labour relations. In particular, it consists in utilizing contractual forms that seem incompatible with the nature of the works that are executed; working patterns that do not correspond with the work that is carried out; the falsification of workers' status.

Using service voucher schemes as way of payment in the Italian construction

In 2008, the Italian government implemented the service voucher payment system (in Italian: buoni lavoro) as a response to the extended use of informal workforce in the grape and apple harvest regions in north-eastern Italy (EUROFOUND, 2009; 2013). This new atypical type of working arrangement was introduced to regulate the payments to occasional – usually migrant – workers who were paid cash-in-hand (INPS, 2014). The initial planning provided that this type of payment could not be never intended as a way of payment for permanent workers; that it would be restricted only to occasional jobs. Each worker could not work more than 30 days in a calendar year and the maximum remuneration could not exceed 5,000 euros (raised to 7,000 with the Jobs Act Reform of 2015). Every single “job voucher” costs 10 euro for the employers that can buy it online, at any post office or tobacco shop. For each 10 euro of face value, workers receive 7,5 euro, whereas the remaining 2,5 euro fund workers' insurance and cover pensions contributions.

The following years, this system has been extended to other sectors in need of occasional workforce such care workers and (domestic) cleaners. According to CGIL (2014), there has been a huge increase of recourse to job vouchers not only in agriculture and domestic services, but also in other sectors in which casual work used to be limited: construction industry, industries and commerce.

Consulting recent press sources, in fact, 30% of total job vouchers in 2015 concern the construction industry (see for instance Savelli, 2016; Latour, 2016). In these reports, trade unions equate the use of job vouchers to irregularity, when used in construction. The requisites for the legal operation of construction firms are not complied; the contributions for the Construction

Workers' Social Security Fund (Cassa Edile) neither. To use job vouchers, it is sufficient to classify a specific job as casual so that the provision of service is not attributable to the National Collective labour agreement. However, within structured building sites, it is not possible that the sub-contractor resort to occasional work, because his firm is carrying out works on behalf of a contractor; it is in conflict with the criterion of direct relationship between the two parts (contractor and sub-contractor) (Latour, 2016). In this, it is worth quoting a Trade Unionist's tale to highlight how vouchers are used in construction.

TU: Is it possible to pay with vouchers in the construction sector? (said with a tone of desperation). No way! (said with anger). The voucher payment system was born for some really occasional works such as domestic works or agriculture. [...] Wandering building sites in Milan, you can find workers saying 'I work legally', but I am asking myself "how is it possible?". If the worker does not appear to have been registered to the Fund (Cassa Edile), how? [...] Being your employer, I can buy vouchers for which – some time ago – it was not even compulsory to declare whom I will use it for. Today, you work here, and you're paid with job vouchers; the day after, you are not insured, not by a long shot! You work in black. You cannot say anything if you need the job! [...] the voucher payment system is the biggest disaster for our sector.

ID: ...and, what about the agreement on the payment?

TU: it's simple. The employer says "today I pay you with the job vouchers, tomorrow I give you 5 euro per hour, or something similar". (Trade Unionist, 6/4/2016, Milan)

From the narration above, it is apparent that at times job vouchers are used to pay construction workers for specific number of days, and then to employ the worker informally, paying him cash-in-hand; or, mixing the two ways of payments. From the time that the employee works for more than 30 days, or in a continuous ways, or for a sub-contractor who has a direct relationship with a contractor, payments with job voucher schemes infringe the labour law; it constitutes a form of undeclared employment. Quoting below another interviewee, it comes that payment with job voucher can be considered a form of informality, when requirements are not met.

In the next case, Jeton was used to work for his uncle who was a self-employed worker. Jeton has been employed undeclared for many years, and when his uncle could not pay him anymore, the two men had a quarrel and did not work together anymore. At the time of interview, Jeton was unemployed and he had only few opportunities to work in construction. He had always relied on his bonding capital, and now he agrees to work under the voucher schemes. It may be said therefore that those whose networks dissolved are likely to accept to be paid with voucher schemes to have a minimum income, and as a way to create new networks.

I worked as electrician for 15 days and I was paid with vouchers. The payment was a bit more; it wasn't a black job, we can name "grey" (Jeton, unemployed builder, aged 35, Milan)

From the citations of this section, service voucher schemes have generated a series of semi-compliant or irregular types of working arrangements. It can be inferred that migrant construction workers are at particular disadvantage, since construction workforce supply has been much higher than the demand. It appears that not much viable alternative job opportunities are available for them, given the general high unemployment rates in the Italian labour market. The risk of spending long periods in unemployment forces migrants to consent to informal employment. Contrary to the reciprocal profit in the case of envelope wage payments for overtime work, informal employment of bogus part-timers and casual workers can be seen as a survival practice of those struggling to maintain their family with their earnings. *Entrapped* migrants without any agency may accept such working arrangements, otherwise they will end up unemployed.

Delinquency with wage theft or wage-withholding

It is well known that oral agreements regulate working arrangements between employers and employees within construction (Thiel, 2012b). In the case of migrant workers in Milan, another informal pattern came to the fore. Even though payrolls for construction workers were legal and the economic transaction is carried out through bank accounts, migrant workers may have to turn back to the employer part of their wage. This amount of money might concern the deposit the employers pay for workers' holiday or/and the end-of-year allowances and holiday and Christmas bonuses. Frenk and Lavrdim describe:

The guy (friend of his) had received the money his boss paid to the Constructions' Fund. The boss made the deposit of all the money to his (friend's) bank account. Then, my friend had to withdraw that money and repay his boss! It's inconceivable! (Frenk, aged 27, Milan).

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[...] workers may receive some money in their account. [...] you take for example 1600 euro for this month, but 150-200 euro you have to give it back to your boss. It's not correct, but it works like this. You can do nothing (Lavrdim, aged 28, Milan).

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When I have to pay you, I give you the wage slip with 10, but from 10 you have to give me back three. Officially, the wage slip is legal, but you have to give me back three. If you

decide to denounce your employer, what can you prove? Nothing! I give you the cheque, I escort you in the bank and you give me back the money! (Trade Unionist, 19/5/2015, Milan)

In this case, workers may accept the terms of such an agreement out of necessity. Even if there seems nothing to be falsified with regards to their formal wage slip, these employees have to repay money of their salary to their employer because it “*works like this*”. They accept to work with exploitative terms out of necessity. Even if I did not interview any Albanian worker engaged in this type of informal work, and quotes come from other respondents’ narrations, I might assume that such exploitative practices concern not only workers without a stay permit, but also regular migrants.

In particular, I interviewed an Egyptian builder (key informant) with regular stay permit, and he had usually repaid money of his salary to his employer. He had been hired by a big company in Milan, but he had to pay money back to that employer who had offered him this position. That employer was an uncle of him that had invited him in Italy ten years ago, and offered him the first irregular job. In this case, this form of informality is connected with the system of brokerage, explored in the previous chapter. Wage is withheld as the remuneration for intermediators who offer to workers job opportunities.

All in all, it can be said that wage-withholding concern those migrants with low capacity to mobilise resources, and even more those without regular stay permit. It may be also assumed that it has ethnic characteristics (Chapter 3), in the sense that such practices are more connected with workers who enter Italy and insert into the labour market assisted by ethnic brokers; in debt to their conationals. In this case too, such practice cannot be characterised as a tactic, let alone strategy. It has the characteristics of a coercive agreement that *entrapped* migrants have to accept to get by during periods of low economic activity

Maximizing the profit as pieceworkers

Virtually legal - informal in reality - payrolls cannot be considered in principle as a proof of declared employment. In the quotes above, it can be inferred that workers unintentionally repay their employer, and for that, they feel exploited. However, it is probable that informality - in spite of the existence of legally proper payrolls - does not imply exploitation, but it concerns a

deliberate agreement between employers and employees on working patterns and payments. It is the case of piece work remuneration, that is when the worker is paid for the amount of work he accomplishes, irrespective of the working hours needed to execute the specific work. Two interviewees describe the way in which they reach an agreement with their employer.

K: [...] there is the game of piece-work (cottimismo), that is to reach an agreement for the execution of a specific work. I was perfectly employed by the company with a perfect fix-termed contract. I work as an average worker and was paid monthly. But, where there was a considerable amount of work, the boss had two options. The first was to subcontract the work to another construction firm, or to do this: he addressed to quick and smart workers like me, and asked "...for five thousand cubic meters of cement, how much do you want?". He (the employer) had calculated the costs, and knew that the agreement could be advantageous for both parts. He paid your wage at the end of the month with cheques so that anyone could see that the transaction was correct. Then, I went to receive the money, 1500 euro for instance, and give it back to him.

ID: ...and then, he paid you even more?

K: Certainly! Because I had made an agreement for a price on a cubic meter of cement around from 50 to 70 euro per cubic meter. One day, I did 700 cubic meter with other 3 people. But, obviously we were running! Try to calculate how much my boss earned that day!

ID: Does this practice still exist?

K: Yes, it does. But, it's difficult to find so. New constructions are not common (Key Informant - Italian builder, 19/4/2016, Milan)

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[...]The aim of this method is to product more. You (employer) select the most smart, good worker guy, and have him to organize the team. It's not the right method to work, because you have to run, and you don't respect security [...] in 2002, I began to work as pieceworker... Piecework means you make an agreement with the firm and you say that for these building sites I want this money... after this, a team of workers was created, and that team was organized by me, and for this reason, I was paid more compared with what I gained before. I was the head of the group, and I was the foreman at the same time. The personnel was selected by me... it still occurs, but now you have to declare the workers. Nowadays, you cannot make the money we earned when almost everyone worked in black (Pirro, aged 39, Milan)

Even if Pirro describes a situation in the 2000s, this method was born six decades ago after the second world war (Paci, 1973:36). The great demand for construction workers drove employers

to ask from their workers to work as fast as they could. It was characterised by labour intensive work practices in order to cover the demand in construction. Groups of workers were formed and organized by the head of pieceworkers (*capo-cottimista*) who was also responsible for the staff recruitment. That figure was usually an old builder with high expertise and skills. The same need for rapid reconstruction of the city is reported also in Greece (Labropoulou, 2009) during the 1960s, and this pattern continues until 2000s. Teams of builders might carry out works based on agreements set per square metre, and their team of workers had to work as fast as they could in order to maximize their incomes. Similar patterns have been also reported for work patterns among Albanian workers (Maroukis *et al.*, 2011).

Working with a piecework agreement consists in working with totally different terms than those written in the contract (or in the daily payroll in the Greek case). According to the majority of the respondents, this form of informal work within construction was very common in 1990s and 2000s, when construction activity was booming. Nowadays, new constructions are less, and piecework agreements are not common, as it was once. In Greece, this pattern has not been reported by any construction worker, since the majority of them are paid fixed daily wages. This form of informal employment undoubtedly relies upon the mutual consent of employers and employees. It constitutes a practice that allows the maximisation of profits for both sides. In this way, migrant builders achieve to retain some control over their time at work, reaping the benefits of their capabilities to work hard and effectively in a specific time span.

Regarding the individual characteristics of the pieceworker and the head of the team, it can be assumed that those who take part of piecework teams are able to work quickly and are “smart”. The smartness encapsulates the competence of optimizing the working time and producing the more in the least time. Those pieceworkers’ embodied skills permitted them to execute heavy work in little time. Apart from these skills, the head of pieceworkers had also to be an experienced worker with leadership skills in order to coordinate the works, and be able to impose himself on other workers (Paci, 1973). As Paci (1973, p.38) points out the head of pieceworkers were usually relative with other workers or originated from the same place. They could impose themselves and controlled the workforce either with threats, or by offering higher salaries. This can be very relevant for Albanian workers who relied on family networks in order to insert in the Italian and Greek labour market. A way for threatening their colleagues could be connected for instance with the possibility to renew the stay permit, since the head of pieceworkers were the ones closer to the employer. Finally, it could not be a coincidence that Pirro has become a construction entrepreneur and with other two partners created a construction company that employed 150 workers in 2001. His organization and leadership skills as head of pieceworkers are demonstrated in practice through his entrepreneurial achievements.

This form of undeclared employment concerns *dynamic* workers who are able to calculate the force relationships and maximise their income. They decide with autonomy to be involved in informality, and they know that, if there were not them, it would not be possible the maximisation of profit for their employer. They know that such agreement may be beneficial for both parts, and thus, it seems that there is a symmetry on information on the rules. Hence, it can be characterised a strategic practice, although it is not so common in the last years.

Bogus self-employed workers

Another form that needs to be explored when studying informal work in construction is that of bogus self-employment. National legislations usually describe the phenomenon only indirectly (Jorens, 2010); within the Italian legislative framework, for instance, there is the term “semi-dependent employment” defined as “disguised work”. Jorens (2010, p.18) argues that the status of a bogus self-employed worker is ambiguous, since “*the job performed seems to classify him/her in an intermediate category between employee and self-employed worker*”. According to Thörnqvist (2011, p.1; 2015, p.421), bogus or false self-employment is ‘*employment disguised in order to circumvent collective agreements, labour laws, employment tax [...] and other employer liabilities that would otherwise be implied in a standard contract of employment*’. Or, alternatively in Cremer’s (2010, p.7) words “Bogus self-employment, also known as disguised employment, occurs when a person who is an employee is not classed as an employee in order to hide his or her true legal status and to avoid costs that may include taxes and social security contributions”. In this sense, the author distinguished two forms of bogus self-employment: first, it may disguise the legal nature of the employment relationship (e.g. commercial, instead of dependent employment relationship); second, employers may repeatedly offer new or renew employment contracts so that the employee do not have the rights and benefits of dependent workers.

Based on these definitions, bogus self-employed workers are present only in the Italian construction sector; with increasing trends (Pedersini and Coletto, 2010), although the difficulty of identifying indicators corroborating the existence of such phenomenon within the sector (Ales and Faioli, 2008, p.6)³¹. The Greek legislation does not provide the existence and the registration of individual firms for a series of professions in construction, so this type of informal working relationships as above defined it cannot exist in Greece.

³¹ In that research, the bogus self-employed has been defined as “a “*one-firm*” worker with a VAT Number, working exclusively for a single business, actually hides an employment relationship and therefore a subordinate employment”.

Drawing upon statistics of the social partners' organizations, Ales and Faioli (2008) argued that self-employment is a growing phenomenon among migrant workers. Data from interviews confirm the existence of this form of informal work. Many of my respondents, dependent workers or owners of individual firms have admitted that they have been asked to be registered with official authorities as self-employed workers, whilst keeping working for their former employer. They might usually work for other subcontractors, or for other self-employed workers in a non-autonomous way, following the instructions of the figure they collaborate with, as if they were dependent workers.

Ibish was the employer of Besian. Besian recounts that Ibish had asked him to become self-employed; otherwise, he had to fire him. Besian did not accept it, since he had fear he would not be able to pay the annual costs of an individual firm. Besian preferred to lose his job, instead of starting up an individual firm. Getting a VAT registration number was the only alternative that had been proposed to him in order to secure his job in the building sector. His employer, Ibish, admitted to me that he did propose to him (Besian) to get a VAT registration number, but he could not guarantee him any fix revenue. Now, Ibish himself usually ends up working as bogus self-employed worker, since he is in financial difficulties.

I: Have you ever thought about becoming self-employed worker?

B: Yes, but it wouldn't work. My boss (Ibish) said to me every so often "register for VAT; get a VAT registration number and I'll make you work". Ok, what about when he has no work? There's no guarantee. You can register for VAT (become self-employed) when you have acquaintances in zone; clients, engineers. But, if I know only him in this sector, what I have to do? I thought about it many times, but when he cannot make me work what I do?

I: So, have you already calculated the cost of...

B: yes, I have already calculated everything. You have to pay much money, even if you don't issue any invoice. It's about seven thousand euros every year. (Besian, aged 44, Milan)

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IB: I employed four workers. At some point, I couldn't pay their salaries and I said to them: "Guys, I'm very sorry, but I am not able to pay you every month". [...] "register for VAT, and we can agree on meter or piecework". Nobody accepted, and now I'm happy because they would have been found themselves in troubles, and I would have felt guilty of their. [...] At the end, all made it to find good jobs, except for one (he refers to Besian, aged 44 Milan)

ID: Some years ago, you said that you worked for big companies as subcontractor. Now, if another artisan (self-employed worker) tells you “come with me to work as worker”, do you accept it or not?

IB: Yes, I do. I don't go to steal; there's no shame when working. I also have the family. The pride may be set aside. [...] I did also works of shit, but the work is not a shame.
(Ibish, aged 38, Milan)

Bogus self-employment may be adopted as a practice to survive in the deregulated Italian building sector. For builders with little social capital becoming self-employed worker can be a very risky choice since it involves high annual fix costs. According to the Italian legislation (INPS – Circolare (Memorandum) no. 15 of January 29, 2016), any owner of an individual firm has to pay a minimum annual fixed cost for social contributions to the National Social Security Institute of 3600 euro, independently to the amount invoiced. To this amount, it should be added an extra payment to the National Institute for Insurance against Accidents at Work (INAIL) and to the Construction Workers' Social Security Fund (Cassa Edile) that varies according to the construction activity and the time each firm operates.

Besian opted not to become (bogus) self-employed worker, since he was aware of the difficulty of doing so; he had only few acquaintances. From the first moment he arrived in Italy in 2004, he had been always employed by the same employer, Ibish. In addition, Besian had already had acquired experience as self-employed worker in Albania. Before he arrived in Italy, he had started up two different businesses: initially, he had a bakery, but his initiative failed. Some years later, he invested in greenhouses, but also in this case he had not any success. It can be said also that migrants who have a certain level of experience about the risk they may assume when working as self-employed workers, they are less likely to become bogus self-employed workers.

Yet, it seems that Albanian workers might opt to start up an individual firm, without having any idea about their obligations that this option could bring upon. One of my respondents, unemployed and in a bad economic situation at the moment of the interview, admitted that he was said to come on the books, without being informed about his obligations. In Jeton's words:

I have been asked to register with VAT number, but I didn't know I had to pay all this money at the end of the year. That bastard accountant hadn't tell me not to invoice every work I did, as all other do. (Jeton, aged 35, Milan)

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I turned back to Albania for a couple of years, but I changed my mind and I came back to Italy. I had to register with VAT to have work. Now, I'm working. [...] I have no idea what I'll pay at the end of the year! (Mirlind, aged 41, Milan)

It is evident therefore that this option has been made by Albanian migrants who have been left in total ignorance of the tax liabilities such a choice involves. Migrants without the cultural capital that permit them to know the risks of such an initiative (language skills, familiarity with legislation), or cheated by their colleagues may start up an individual construction firm as a way to continue working in construction and have an income.

At the same time, Albanian own-account workers have relied on other bogus self-employed workers due to their financial weakness to employ workforce. They follow the general trend in the labour market due to the casualization in construction, collaborating with other self-employed workers, instead of employing stable personnel. In this case, it comes to the fore a peculiar phenomenon. Self-employed migrant workers may work for less money for works subcontracted to other self-employed workers, and, at the same time, the same self-employed workers may take benefit from “employing” other self-employed workers, because in this way the labour cost is lower in comparison to the amount they should paid for dependent workers’ contributions. It comes therefore that it has been created a complex nexus of altered relations between self-employed workers in which those who have the capacity to undertake subcontract work are more likely to benefit than those with a bogus status. An increase in social capital and cultural capital could implicate the alteration of the roles, as analysed in Chapter 3.

ID: When you need more workers, do you assume personnel?

L: Not dependent workers! We take self-employed workers, like me. But they have to be legal: if some control comes, they must fulfil any legal obligations. (Liridon, aged 41, Milan)

Working as bogus self-employed worker for other contractors or sub-contractors is not the only form of working arrangements relative to this phenomenon. Again, many of the respondents representing trade unions reported cases of migrants who make part of construction cooperatives without being aware of the status attributed to them; their rights and their obligations. This case of bogus self-employment regards members of construction cooperatives who might have accepted the proposal of their ex employer to become partners, since it was the only way that guarantee employment. In this case too, Albanian migrants with little social capital, and poor language competences and lacking knowledge of legislative framework may drive workers being engaged in such informal working arrangements.

There are people who don't know that they are partner of the cooperative because they work as before and they have a wage. They don't even look at what they sign, they don't receive any wage slip. They appear that they've paid an annual fee; they've participated

in general meetings of the cooperative; they've done many things. In reality, they've done nothing else rather working as dependent workers. We talk about black economy, the mechanism is always the same: it prevails the oral agreement, the threat, the blackmail, the need; you just work and that is your pay, full stop. (Trade Unionist, 25/5/2015, Milan)

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To create a cooperative you need only nine partners. I (who has the power) send you formal letters, documents, I invite you to participate in the general assemblies, I don't care! It doesn't mean that you control what we (cooperative) are. In this case, there are those with a VAT number, but, actually, they're all dependent workers. (Trade Unionist, 8/7/2015, Milan)

Even if many self-employed migrants have advanced their career by starting up an individual firm, it has not been a deliberate decision, but rather it was a practice to avoid becoming unemployed. It comes therefore that this practice may be seen as a *survival* response for those *entrapped* migrants who could not find employment anymore as dependent workers. It entails high risks since migrants without their own circle of acquaintances may remain without income from one moment to the next. There seems to be also an asymmetry of information between employers and bogus self-employed workers, when migrants have no idea about the obligations arising from this working status.

Differently, this practice may be seen as a tactical choice for *expectant* migrants who possess a higher level of social and cultural capital. The decision to become self-employed workers may yield long-term benefits, since these subjects may have the opportunity to expand their network and escape from the “false” status, and work as really independent workers. In this case, these individuals seem to be aware of the risks they undertake. Further, they may also save costs when they bid and assume works, employing other bogus self-employed workers.

Registering with VAT and becoming self-employed worker has not been opted only as practice to continue working in construction, but also as a practice to renew the stay permit. The link between informal employment and stay permit renewal is argued in the next paragraph.

4.5.4 Informal work in construction and residence permit renewal

As introduced in Chapter 1, both in Italy and Greece the necessary condition for labour migrants to have a valid stay permit is the existence of a formal job contract. This rigid link between formal employment and stay permit generated hurdles for migrant workers who remained unemployed

during the economic recession. Without having any proofs of formal employment, they were not able to renew their stay permit. However, it is not only the case of unemployed migrants who needed proofs to renew their stay permit, but it concerns also workers engaged in informal working arrangements who are not able to prove formal employment.

Many migrants who have not met the requisites to renew their work permit have usually relied on brokers (Ambrosini, 2016), or have been assisted by their employers (Ambrosini, 2015) to continue residing with regular documents in the destination country. As analysed also in the next chapter, in times of crisis, many unemployed migrants have achieved to renew their stay permits through their wives' employment. In Greece, Triandafyllidou (2015) argues that migrants have also taken advantage of the relaxation of the requisites to renew their documents, since the number of workdays has fallen to 50 in one year, whereas stay permits are exceptionally awarded for humanitarian reasons to persons that lapsed into irregularity. Here, two more practices have been adopted by my respondents to renew their stay permit, and have access to health care system: migrants in Italy may renew their stay permit by starting up an individual firm; or, by 'buying' daily social contributions from engineers, or building work developers through informal transactions in Greece. In this last paragraph, therefore, I explore how informal employment in the Greek and Italian residential construction is intertwined with immigrant status. In the Italian case, it is shown how migrants may opt to become bogus self-employed workers to maintain their regular status. In the Greek case, it is argued that informal migrant workers in need of proofs of days of work can utilise their social capital to acquire welfare stamps.

Working informally and buying welfare stamps to renew the stay permit and the health insurance card

In Greece, according to the recent amendment to the immigration law passed in 2014, immigrants have to prove that they have been employed for at minimum 50 days within one year; 50 welfare stamps that certify formal employment. To explain how migrants - notwithstanding working undeclared - may acquire the minimum amount of construction welfare stamps I take once again as an example the construction of a new house of 100m² (page. 140).

For that house, local authorities have calculated that the minimum time/labour needed to construct is 135 days of work. When the building permit is issued, the developer is called to

prepay part of the social contributions of the workers. At the time he prepays the amount of money to the Fund, he is not obliged to declare the names of the workers who will work in the new construction. Regarding the works of the flooring installers, for instance, the developer has to declare the names of the workers who will be insured for 22 days of work for flooring, minimum work time calculated by the local authority. Let's make a hypothesis that the developer assume only one worker, Tom Harper, who works for 22 days, but it has been agreed that Tom Harper will work undeclared and will be paid cash-in-hand. In the meanwhile, the developer is obliged to declare a name to the Fund, so that the already paid contributions are assigned to one natural person. At that moment, the developer decides to declare the name of another worker, Gary Hetty, who has never entered the building site, and will not ever do so to work in the new house of this example. To do this, the developer may ask an amount of money of Gary Hetty who is in need of 22 welfare stamps within 2017. The false declaration implies that the developer and Gary Hetty come out in agreement for the price of this transaction.

In the same way, many Albanian builders may utilise their social network to 'buy' welfare stamps by any developer or engineer who have not declared any worker's name for some work in progress. Portes (1995) highlights the importance of social networks for migrants. In this sense, connections with other workers or people working in the construction industry is indispensable. Migrant construction workers who are able to access information of who may "sell" them welfare stamps may achieve to renew their stay permit; to have access to the health care system; to be granted social benefits, since they depend on proofs of days of work. Albanian builders' social networks are indispensable in acquiring proofs of formal employment.

In any case, this informal pattern generates profit to developers (landowners or construction firms) who have to pay a specific amount of money for workers' social contributions when applying for the building permit. After that, they may offer work to informal workers, and at the same time to gain money by "selling" the already prepaid welfare stamps to other workers who are in need of proofs of workdays. Avni describes how this practice is widespread in the Greek construction sector and that workers end up working informally in

order to have an income. At the same time, they have to “buy” welfare stamps from other developers so they can renew their stay permit or health insurance card.

[...] it was a cousin of mine who introduced me to this engineer. When he (cousin) called me, I was said that I would have been insured. When I started working in that building site I work now, all workers were uninsured; I alike. We work in this building and the developer sell the welfare stamps to other people! [...] I work for him, but in the list of the workers there is not my name! Since my developer has sold the welfare stamps to other workers, I have to call all people I know to ask them if they know other developers or engineers who sell welfare stamps. I need them to renew my health insurance card. The problem is that welfare stamps do not exist! It's difficult to find someone to sell them to you! (Avni, aged 34, builder, Athens)

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I hadn't work for one year, and I had to renew my health card. I bought 50 welfare stamps for 1000 euros. [...] the contractor I work for it's a young guy and he is very correct. He declares our names for each work we do. Older small contractors tell you ' there are 40 working days for this building, I share to you (workers) these welfare stamps', but, in reality, in the license it's written "60 working days" and we know that the remaining 20 welfare stamps he sells them to earn extra money. Maybe, you know that for that building work there provided 60 welfare stamps, but you don't want to argue, because you are in risk to remain unemployed (Gjin, aged 34, Athens).

Avni accepted to work uninsured although he had been said that he would have been declared. He opted to work and not to remain unemployed, because he has to maintain his family. He had to “buy” 50 welfare stamps to renew his health insurance card. However, he underlined the difficulty of finding a developer who “has bought” welfare stamps that can be for sale. To find out welfare stamps in the black market, the concerned persons need to have the acquaintances; to possess social capital.

It may be the case of people who live in Athens buying welfare stamps from contractors or developers in Thessaloniki: he needs 50 welfare stamps multiplied by 30 euro, 1500 euro for 50 working days! [...] or each welfare stamp may cost 25 euro. At times, there are the engineers that make the intermediation between owner (developer) and the concerned person, since the owner (developer) does not know who to declare for the works in his house for instance. The engineer may take a kickback, a commission of 10% to 15%. [...] we (Albanian community) constitute a big village. My uncle who lives in

Thessaloniki may buy welfare stamps by a friend of him in Athens. It works like this.
(Taulant, aged 34, Athens)

As it comes from this quote, another social actor intermediating between developers and workers may be the engineer. Engineers are the professionals who are in touch with both landowners or small-scale contractors and workers. From the last quote, it is obvious that engineers may have profit of this illicit transaction up to 15%. Informal economic exchanges imply also trust among social actors. As for the price of informal transactions there seems not to be a standard price for welfare stamps, but it is up to the two parts' relationship; and, it depends from the price the developer paid for each stamp.

I am obliged to buy welfare stamps from other engineers, but it is necessary to have acquaintances, because there is fear; you have to know where to sell the welfare stamps. [...] it happened to me one year to pay 25 for each welfare stamp; I had paid 2000 euro.
(Ramiz, small contractor, aged 48, Athens).

Although finding trustworthy persons is valuable for such transactions, it seems that the illicit "commerce" of welfare stamps is such a widespread phenomenon that there have been also advertisements in newspapers in which there have been sought purchasers of welfare stamps. In this extreme case, it seems how an illicit practice becomes prevalent and normal that a developer seeks for workers in need of welfare stamps through advertisements.

There a lot of advertisements in which it's written 'welfare stamps for sale'! What does it mean? Welfare stamps for sale! And for this there has not been any government or minister to react! (Trade Unionist, 12/7/2016, Athens).

It is surprising how such a demand or offer for illicit transactions can be published in a website or in a newspaper. After this testimony, I sought for such advertisements on web and I realized that there are in fact people seeking to buy or to sell welfare stamps. In this case, it is obvious how the normalization and the tolerance vis-à-vis informal practices and the absence of control mechanisms to detect and combat such illicit phenomena enable the prevalence of informal economy.

I am builder and I seek to buy (construction) welfare stamps from building sites anywhere in Greece. If there is interest, please call me. [Name] [telephone number] (web)

Another element linked to this illicit market is that some professional categories are penalised. Painters, for example, one of the last professions entering building sites are penalised. Apart from painters, penalisation may concern trades undertaking building completion activities such as plastering, glazing, floor and wall covering for instance. As Ramiz recounts, developers usually have already sold the welfare stamps relating to paintings, since they need money immediately. Painters are one of the professional categories always looking for welfare stamps. Contrary to painters, it is more possible that professional categories entering first in building sites and executing works visible to work inspectors (ironers, carpenters) may be formally employed.

Painters' complaint is that they take the least welfare stamps, because we are the last enter building sites. The developer will have usually sold the welfare stamps when we start painting. How many lies we have been said by employers! I remember one time when I missed 5 welfare stamps (to renew the stay permit) and I asked the engineer to insure me for more 5 days, and he told me that I have to ask the owner. The owner said me that he had been given other names to declare and there were no more welfare stamps available for that work. The engineer had sold them to another guy. (Ramiz, small contractor, aged 48, Athens).

In the face of this form of informality, migrant workers may develop responses to improve their livelihood and maximise their profits. Since the commerce of welfare stamps in the Greek construction sector became the rule, migrants have to calculate how many welfare stamps they need for each calendar year to buy, so they can renew their stay permit; obtain their health insurance card; and receive social benefits, as already analysed. Two of my respondents who work as small-scale contractors admitted that they usually work wholly-off-the-books and undeclared. They buy the number of welfare stamps they need in each calendar year through their social networks, seeking to maximise their profits.

I usually work uninsured. It's on both owner's and my interest, because I gain more. The welfare stamps I need I buy them through other engineers I know. I call them and they sell me the welfare stamps left from different building sites. I usually buy 70 to 100 welfare stamps per year. I usually pay 15 euro each stamp; or 12, 13 euro; it depends on its value. In this way, I pay almost 1500 euro per year. I try to be insured for at least 76 working days and not more than number, so I can take the yearly benefit for builders. It's about 680€ per year. I take also Christmas benefit that it amounts almost 500-600€. So, I take

1280€; it's almost the same thing. In this way, I had never any issue with my stay permit.
(Valmir, aged 56, Athens).

Here, it would be useful to recall Pirro's (2015) work on migrant agricultural worker in Southern Italy. The author analysed a very similar mechanism in agriculture where migrant workers "buy" a certain amount of daily contributions in order to renew their stay permit, or to receive their unemployment benefits. This mechanism is considered as beneficial for both employers and migrants who are parts of an entire system that works in a certain way. In this way, employers reduce labour cost, and migrants enjoy welfare benefits, and have the right to regular stay permit. However, the author underlines that not all the migrants have the money to "invest" on such a welfare benefit.

Pirro's (2015) findings are very similar to what happens in the Greek residential construction. Since Albanian migrants' regular status, access to health and welfare benefits depends on the proof of a certain amount of daily contributions, they opt to "buy" them either to increase their income, or to maintain their regular status and have access to health care. Characterizing this practice as "survival" or "strategic" depends mainly on the reason for which migrants opt to "buy" welfare stamps and the power relations. Those who calculate and buy the number of welfare stamps they need to access welfare subsidies, and work informally as off-the-books own-account workers by choice, use *strategically* this pattern to increase their income. On the other hand, it might be an involuntary option for those with a limited financial capital, or those who need to prove formal employment in order to renew their stay permit. Indeed, it cannot be considered that all migrants have the possibility to "buy" welfare stamps, since many of them may lack the financial capital. A further constraint in the Greek case is considered the limited number of construction welfare stamps due to the link between daily contributions and building permits. In this case, it might be assumed that migrants with a wider network are more likely to buy welfare stamps for any purpose. Hence, it can be assumed that those who have to buy

Starting up an individual firm in Italy

As already presented, starting up an individual firm in construction has been considered a strategy employed by migrants who cannot achieve to renew their stay permit. Tarantino (2012) argues that starting up an individual firm can be a solution to renew the stay permit up to two years in Italy. Because of the rigid link between work and regular status (Triandafyllidou and Ambrosini, 2011) introduced with the Bossi-Fini law (189/2002), migrants have to prove that they are in a sound, permanent employment relationship in order to renew their stay permit; or, alternatively, that they are registered with VAT with the Chamber of Commerce. In this case, they are assigned the regular immigrant status up to 2 years.

It was a very critical point... I had to renew my residence permit; there was no solution other than acquiring a VAT registration number. Nobody wanted to hire me. [...] As an artisan, I lost much money from unpaid work. Companies that go bankrupt and disappear. You cannot claim your rights! I was left with 50 euros in my bank account. It was a nightmare for me and for my family! (Saban, aged 41, self-employed, Milan)

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It's very easy to apply for a VAT registration at the Chamber of Commerce. With 300 - 400 euros, you can be registered as a self-employed. Autonomous workers can do whatever they want; nobody controls you. If someone asks you to prove your income, there are the accountants to produce a false income tax return statement." (Trade Unionist, 25/5/2015, Milan)

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Many people were obliged to register with VAT, not because it was the only way they could find a job, rather not having a job and being in Italy without a stay permit, they didn't want to become clandestine. (Trade Unionist, 9/7/2015, Milan)

The low cost of registration with the Chamber of Commerce as a self-employed worker in residential construction permits many regular migrants whose stay permit is to expire to renew it. The general feeling that controls are insufficient or not frequent make migrants' thinking about starting up an individual firm and continuing working as bogus self-employed worker in order to renew their stay permit. However, this pattern cannot be considered of low risk, since annual expenses of any individual firm are – at minimum – 4000 euro. As already argued, this practice may be regarded either survival or tactical; survival for those without any alternative option and limited social ties; tactical for those with entrepreneurial aspirations.

4.6. Conclusions

This chapter explored questions related to Albanian workers' engagement in various forms of informal employment in the Greek and Italian residential construction. It discussed the informal employment patterns presented within Athens and Milan, shedding light on the various nuances of the phenomenon. Such evidences revealed different reasons for which immigrants may be involved in informal economic activities, and permitted the distinction of practices on the basis of the power of the individual and the capacity to mobilize resources to pursue his goals. Hence, it is worth pointing out the importance of applying qualitative methods to grasp diverse forms of informality (Coletto, 2010), and nuanced context-bound understandings, that quantitative studies cannot do so.

It is also important to note that all of my participants have being involved in informal working patterns. Informal employment is omnipresent within residential construction in Milan and Athens. An interesting point is that participation in informality is at times contingent and ascribed. Albanian migrant workers started to work in an economic sector in which informal employment already existed and was established prior to their arrival (Reyneri, 1998). From the very beginning of their working experience in both countries, the vast majority of them worked irregularly without any form of insurance. On the other hand, they arrived from an economic context in which contractual arrangements were inexistent. Having worked in a state-regulated economy, Albanians were suspicious towards collective and institutional actors. This factor has further pushed them to be engage in informality, since in both contexts they have rarely felt protected from labour inspectors or trade unions against "employers' power". Under these circumstances, Albanian builders' involvement in informal employment may be considered as a result of institutional incongruence related both to past and actual experiences.

The following summary table reflects Albanian migrants' engagement in informality. The quality of practices follows the general categorization of migrants' responses to economic crisis, in that *survival*, *tactical*, *strategic*. Here, informal practices have been qualified as: (1) "survival", when it concerns powerless passive actors forced to accept informal employment out of necessity; (2) "tactical", when it regards social actors with limited negotiation power who can occasionally take benefits of such engagement; (3) "strategical", for those powerful subjects who participate voluntarily in informal employment and maximize their profit (De Certeau, 1984). Such division offers a more analytical approach on informal economic practices, since it focuses on the quality of practices and power relations among social actors. In the summary figure 4.2., I highlight how each informal working pattern may be the result of passive acceptance of working conditions, tactical or strategic option.

Figure 4.2. – Summary table of forms of informality per type of practice (*survival, tactical, strategic*)

Type of informality	Sub-category	QUALITY OF PRACTICE – TYPE OF USE		
		Survival	Tactical	Strategic
Under-declared employment	Undeclared overtime pay	Unpaid - Forced acceptance of working terms (irregular migrants or/and low social capital)	Part of overtime work may be paid. Low negotiation power due to problems with legal status or limited social capital	Agreement between skilled workers and employers. Beneficial for both parts
	Extended part-time contracts	Full-time workers with no other option (less skilled or due to problems with legal status)	Exploitation of part-time contracts to renew the stay permit	No evidence
	Falsification of employment status	Passive acceptance by the majority of workers	No evidence	No evidence
Undeclared employment	Regular migrant workers	Forced to accept such arrangement (in need of income – possible problems with stay permit renewal)	Opted for those who disdain formal employment and aiming at increasing revenues	Own-account workers operate without licences or building permits
	Secondary or multiple jobs holders	No evidence	Occasional workers	Own-account workers with another activity
	Undeclared irregular migrants	Legal status does not permit to be employed formally. New arrived migrants or those with low social, cultural and social capital might be forced to accept exploitative terms, whereas those more integrated may work with better conditions.		
	“Unemployed” undeclared	No evidence	No evidence	Benefit claimers
	(Un)paid informal work	Cultural reasons – sense of community		
Bogus working arrangements	Using service voucher schemes	Forced acceptance of working terms – no alternative option for employment	No evidence	No evidence
	Delinquency with wage theft or wage-withholding	Forced acceptance of working terms – no alternative option for employment	No evidence	No evidence
	Pieceworkers	No evidence	No evidence	Skilled workers - Beneficial for both employers and employees
	Bogus Self-employment	Forced acceptance of working terms – no alternative option for employment	When there are entrepreneurial aspirations	To exploit other bogus self-employed – To renew the stay permit

In many cases, immigrant workers' participation in informal economy constitutes involuntary *survival* practices in order to continue working in the construction sector, and have an income. Contrary to migrants' deliberate options to be engaged in informal employment, findings show how Albanians have to accept to be employed irregularly, with few or no rights, below their qualifications and without access to social benefits in order to continue gaining access to basic livelihood. In this sense, there have been examples of migrant workers being undeclared or under-declared out of necessity; exploited individuals by employers; due to clients' demand for undeclared services. It was also the case of bogus self-employed workers who are constrained to start up an individual firm, so that they not remain unemployed. It concerns also migrants who have part-time contracts, but they work as full-timers, and migrants who are declared to social authorities and paid not in accordance to their qualifications. In the most extreme forms of the phenomenon, Albanians in Italy may have to turn back part of their wage to their employer though they have a permanent contract, whereas in Greece Albanian builders have to 'buy' their daily social contributions through their employers or social network.

However, migrants' involvement in construction may be seen sometimes the result of *tactical* planning in the sense that social actors may have temporal benefits by manoeuvring and negotiating spaces shaped by powerful agents. It can be the case when Albanian migrants achieve to renew their stay permits through informal working arrangements; maximize their revenues by working off-the-books; have a side employment and earn money by occasional works; usually motivated by their distrust with regard to the host societies' formal institutions.

In all three types of informality presented above, there have been evidences that informality may be the result of a *strategic* decision jointly agreed by employers and employees. Both parties seek to increase revenues and evade tax obligations. It is the case when migrant workers opt not to declare overtime work or they are holders of another formal job. Migrants may opt also to work informally when formal employment is not compatible with various allowances, or select not to be paid on the basis of their permanent contract, in case of piece-work. Self-employed workers may cut expenses by hiring other bogus self-employed workers, or opt to work informally to avoid taxes.

In my respondents' stories, it has been also found that informal employment is interlinked with stay permit renewals. In the Italian sector, starting up an individual firm and working as a bogus self-employed constitutes an adaptation practice to law requirements for regularizing immigrant status. Hence, immigrants may take advantage of low (or any) requirements to register with Chamber of Commerce and opt to become autonomous workers to acquire the stay permit. In Greece, because of the inexistent legislative provision of individual firms for many professions

in residential construction, migrant cannot use the same pattern. Instead of becoming autonomous, Albanians in Greece have to utilize their social networks in order to buy daily social contributions from developers. Once they have ensured proofs of 50 days of work, they do not have any other obligations to state authorities as Albanian independent workers do in Italy. In this respect, it has been also illustrated how migration policies may affect informal employment. From 2011 onwards, there have been a series of laws in Greece establishing less rigid requirements to renew stay permits. Now, Albanians in Greece have to prove just 50 days of work in a calendar year to regularize their status and access health care system.

At the same time, it is not only the changes to the migration law at a national level that affect informal employment, but also at a supranational one. Albania's accession to the Schengen countries' space enable Albanians' free movement and stay within Italy and Greece up to three months. Albanians have not any more to apply for short-term visas in order to move and visit Italy and Greece, rather they are able to overstay in these countries and work informally in construction. This change enabled migrants without documents to move without restrictions and work informally in the Greek and Italian construction sector.

In the light of these findings, I think than it would be useful to reflect on how existing theories on informal economy may address such complex phenomena involving migrant workers in construction.

Firstly, it has been demonstrated how different nuances of informality are closely interweaved with formal employment, confirming theories on the continuum between formal and informal realm. It has been apparent how immigrants' involvement in informal economic practices in the Italian and Greek residential construction cannot be studied separate from formal employment patterns; rather, there is a need of moving beyond dualist theorists on informal economy to have more nuanced understandings. The results demonstrated the lack of ability to address the multifarious nature of informal employment with simplistic explanations. They have provided evidences to support each and every theoretical lens by focusing on specific types of informal employment. Informality does not always concern poor workers whose activities are distinct from wage employment, neither has to do with 'backwardness' and 'underdevelopment',

Secondly, structuralists' theories that see workers' engagement in informal work as the outcome of vast deregulation in the labour market, and state's concessions to big companies are fitting to interpret a series of informal practices. However, migrant builders' involvement in informality is the result of actors' deliberate action in order to maximize their income, as it was the case of off-the-books self-employed workers. In addition, this theory seems rather problematic for the Greek case, since labour relations in residential construction vary considerably from those in advanced

capitalist economies. For instance, the lack of provision for the existence of structured and registered individual firms for a range of building trades cannot be considered as an outcome of informalisation from above (Slavnic, 2010); rather, it has to do with non-regulated working relations within the Greek construction.

Thirdly, the “exit option” that sees actors’ actions as an effort to avoid burdensome bureaucratic procedures in order to maximize revenues cannot contribute to interpret workers’ participation in informal economy except in the case of off-the-books own-account workers and those unemployed who receive double salaries. Yet, it cannot properly explain even the category of off-the-books own-account workers, because even this category of informal workers is involved in a continuum of formal and informal employment.

Fourthly, theories that consider economic actors’ participation in informal economy associated with redistribution and sociality reasons can interpret only a small number of cases in which migrant construction workers offer services to family members and friends. In this case, it does not seem appropriate to use such theories in urban contexts characterized by high levels of individualization. Thus, it might be considered that this form of informality is rather connected with sense of obligation towards bonding social ties.

Finally, with regard to theories that tend to interpret social actors’ participation in informal economy as the result of low tax morality and incongruence between formal and informal institutions (Williams *et al.*, 2015), it can be assumed that this asymmetry may influence actors’ economic actions up to a certain degree. The main limit of this approach is that during the economic crisis social actors’ involvement in informality seems to occur out of necessity, and less due to distrust towards formal institutions.

Examining the various forms of informal employment, I highlighted some individual characteristics that affect social actors’ capacity to negotiate working arrangements. In my case studies, capacity to benefit from informal working arrangements is contingent on one’s legal status (Maroukis *et al.*, 2011). When they hold a long-term stay permit or EU citizenship, they may negotiate work arrangements from a better position. Indeed, migrants with short-term stay permit or without stay permit may be more exploitable; they may be “weak” actors when they have to ask to be paid for overtime work for instance; when their wages are withheld.

The second factor that influences migrants’ negotiating power is their economic situation. In this case, migrants with major savings before the crisis, and those whose wives have been employed the last years seem to be at a better position when bargaining their contracts or working terms. In this case, migrants who work totally undeclared may opt to do so in order to maximize their

income, since their family health coverage is ensured through wife's employment. It is also obvious that second job-holders may be able to negotiate in a more active way, since they have already a source of income. It is also true that migrant workers with a high financial capital may abuse informal patterns in construction and be registered as self-employed workers in order to acquire their stay permit.

Family status is another determinant in the bargaining of contractual terms. It is expected that workers with families may held a much weaker position that those without. As I illustrated before, migrants who have created families have to go to work undeclared to maintain their families, whereas single migrant builders may develop tactical practices that

Another determinant that lies behind the bargaining power of a migrant worker is the position he has within the network (Perrotta, 2011). It might be said that foremen are in a better position than other workers to demand the respect of the contractual terms, as it was the case regarding the mismatch between expertise and employment status. In this respect, workers may increase their bargaining power when it occurs collectively; when a group of workers negotiate with employers in a solid way.

Professional and organizational skills is undoubtedly another empowering factor for migrants' position vis-à-vis their employers. As it has been showed in the case of piece-workers, competent builders with organizational skills may take benefit of informal working arrangements and to optimize their benefits. On the other hand, manual workers are found in a disadvantageous position, since it is expected that skilled workers may replace them even in unskilled tasks.

Cultural capital is another "weapon" at the hands of workers when engaged in informal working arrangements. It is particularly relevant when migrants opt to work as off-the-books own-account workers and negotiate with native clients. In this respect, time of stay (Maroukis *et al.*, 2011) is of particular importance, since it might be assumed that migrants' with more years since migration may have developed better linguistic skills than newcomers for instance. Cultural capital is extremely important also for irregular migrants it was the case of my respondent with irregular migrant status who has been even able to undertake occasional works as own-account worker.

Last but not least, there is a last factor that may influence migrant builders' practices in informal economy that is the role of the state. As it has been shown, state policies may influence migrants' calculus when deciding to engage in informality. In other words, the inability of the state to persuade migrant workers for the utility of declared employment, and the introduction of economic disincentives for declaring incomes, may push migrants to accept informal jobs that they would not accept if they were convinced of the utility of declared employment. For instance,

migrants' pessimism with regard to the prospect of receiving a pension in the future may push them towards informality, especially when these representations couple with cultural values. In particular, it has been illustrated how Albanian migrants' belief in being assisted by their children when they will not be able anymore to work, may induce their engagement in informal working patterns.

Making a reflection on economic crisis' impact on migrants' involvement in informal economic activities, it can be said that recession effects weakened household economic situation, that is their financial capital. Migrants' with less financial capital seem to be weaker when bargaining with their employers, and it may be assumed that they are likely to accept even poorer conditions to have an income. On the other side, both employers and clients seem to seek to avoid high costs that declared employment entail, mainly during a period of recession. However, firm conclusions cannot be drawn due to the nature of data.

Chapter 5

Albanians' coping practices during the economic crisis: between staying put and creating new transnational spaces

5.1 Introduction

In the previous chapters, I explored Albanian builders' coping practices to remain employed in building trades, as well as their effort to turn into opportunities informal economic patterns in which they are involved. Here, attention turns to migrants' practices outside the range of construction activities in the host country. In other words, in the present chapter, I use empirical material to illustrate builders' actions in order to get by during prolonged periods of unemployment in construction in Milan and Athens. In doing so, I divide migrants' practices in two categories, based on a geographical dimension: first, I analyse those undertaken within the territory of the host country, and, second, I explore responses related to migrants' mobility within transnational spaces.

Apart from social actors' responses related to building trades that have been analysed in Chapter 3, another subcategory of practices misses in this chapter: those practices related to migrants' option to return to Albania. Although I had some informal discussions with Albanian migrants during my trip in Albania (Chapter 2), I did not interview any returnee. Hence, the empirical evidence on this category comes from Albanian migrants' representations on returnees, as well as on findings from other scientific research.

In this chapter, *entrapped* migrants are totally dependent on wives' employment. Their household may also rely on collective or institutional actors to be provided essential commodities. They have no plans to migrate again, and if their situation worsens even further, they may opt to return to their home country. *Expectant* migrants may lean on wives' employment during unemployment periods, and have already attempted to return or to re-emigrate towards another EU country, but they might fail mainly to find a permanent alternative solution, because they lack the legal requirements to work outside the host country. They may find employment opportunities in the global construction. *Dynamic* migrants have the possibility to re-emigrate towards another (EU) country is high, and they may do so at any time, since they have acquired the long-term EU permit or EU citizenship. They may also work in global construction industry.

The analysis starts by exploring Albanian migrants' coping practices in Italy and Greece. Those include household cut expenditures, occupational mobility, household division of labour, and relying on collective and institutional actors. In the second part of analysis, I shed light on migrants' transnational mobility, where the discussion is on how migrants create new transnational spaces, and how they use them to plan a new migratory episode, or to get by during crisis. The chapter closes with some general conclusions.

5.2 Coping with the economic crisis in Italy and Greece

The Italian and Greek construction sector has been of extreme importance in migrant employment. Thousand migrant construction workers lost their job because of the economic recession from 2008 onwards. In general, during an economic downturn, immigrants run higher risks to remain jobless with respect to natives, because the former group usually possesses less varied skills (Dustman *et al.*, 2006), and becomes victim of discrimination by host society (Rogers *et al.*, 2009). Although the possibility of migrants' marginalization and impoverishment (Tilly, 2011), it remains unclear how migrants may react, and what kind of actions they undertake in the face of the crisis in each specific context.

Alluding at migrants' coping strategies during crisis periods, Rogers and colleagues (2009, p.11) suggest "*caution in lumping together all immigrant or ethnic minority groups*". Reviewing the literature on general patterns of hyper-cyclical unemployment, they highlighted how recession effects might differ by gender, ethnic group, socio-economic context. As for coping practices during economic downturn, it have been suggested that social actors may seek a new job or start up an individual activity; remain inactive and rely on solidarity networks; cut expenditure; or opt for further mobility (internal, re-emigration or return migration).

5.2.1 Cost savings in expenditure

Social actors tend to cut initially expenditure on luxuries, amusements, and entertainment, and then to alternate their diet or limit the use of some necessity goods. Smith and Stenning (2006) argued that social actors might carry out also non-market economic practices, such as domestic food production and self-provisioning, or reciprocal exchange of goods for labour and forms of barter.

With respect to the Italian case, de Luca (2014) illustrates that many unemployed migrants have changed their dietary habits, not acquiring any more expensive products and diminishing the quantities they were used to consume. Migrants also seem to provide lower amount or even no remittances to their families in the home country. The next step to face financial obligations seems to be the consumption of their savings, before they opt to borrow money from their informal networks. Hence, many unemployed migrants might have to postpone their plans to buy a house, and, even worse, some of them might not afford to repay the mortgages or to pay the monthly rent rates. Likewise, Sacchetto and Vianello (2016) argue that immigrants have followed similar strategies to minimize the living costs. The authors show that immigrants have to take hard decisions to face economic crisis, such as limiting of medical check-ups, mainly for the adult family members; keeping the children at home instead of sending them to nursery schools; travelling back home less frequently; even reducing water, electricity and gas consumption.

Research on recession impacts on Albanian migrants in Greece and their coping practices suggests that migrants' remittances to their families have been considerably shrunk (Michail, 2013; Gemi, 2014). On the contrary, Albanians have claimed that they may receive remittances by their families in Albania. Albanian migrants' also daily expenditures have been significantly reduced, and many immigrants' savings have disappeared. They have to decrease consumption, and leisure activities such as holidays, or children's after-school activities might be limited (Michail, 2013).

Drawing on my material, a first coping practice in recession years seems to be the effort to minimize living costs. The vast majority of my respondents had to reduce the household expenses as response against unemployment. This practice seems to be a one-street-way for single-income families. Hence, Albanian families had to minimize the living costs, and seek other sources of income; especially, those who remained without any source of income during the crisis. All my participants have responded by reducing expenses during the last seven years. Replies such as *"we don't spend so much for food anymore"*, *"we had to sell the car"*, *"now, I cannot send money anymore back home"* were very frequent, when I asked for the practices that (unemployed) people adopted to cope with the crisis. What is worth underlying is the importance of migrants' ties with native population in resolving housing issues and reducing costs concerning small children's care.

The next three cases demonstrate how reciprocal trust and good relationship with native owners may constitute means to save money. Reciprocal trust may result in house expenditure savings that involve non-market economic practices, such as exchange of free shelter or rent discounts for labour or services. Leka is 54 years old and he worked as a carpenter. He lives in Athens with his wife and two school-age children. He remained unemployed since 2012, and from then onwards he has found work only occasionally. His wife works as an elderly caregiver in an apartment

located next to their house. Even if they do not possess the house where they live, they do not have to pay rent. Leka and his wife have been provided free shelter, since his wife has proved devotion to the employer's family. Although she accepted to work for less money, she is a full-time declared worker.

My wife earns 500 euro a month to take care that old lady. [...] we had no problems with documents, because my wife is declared (has a formal full-time contract). They (employer's family) are very kind with us, and they have given the house we live for free. We only pay the electricity bills (Leka, aged 54, Athens)

Leka's example qualifies as a household *tactic* to save money. His wife has been able to negotiate with her employer, and has been given free shelter. The continuity of this practice is not within household's power, since her employer may decide to make good use of the house, and rent it in exchange of money to maximize the benefits; or, in the case that the old woman for whom Leka's wife works passes away. Hence, the temporary victory of the family of Leka may fade out, since the house belongs to the "others". I found out a similar case also in the Italian context. Sabir lives with his family in the countryside, few kilometres far from Milan. He lives in a house inside a renovated farmstead, and he is employed undeclared as a concierge for the structure; he is responsible for the surveillance of the building. Having gained the trust of his Italian neighbours, he enjoys free shelter during hard times. Also, in this case, Sabir's tactic is temporary, since people residing in the building might change their mind and employ another person.

I am the guard here (farmstead). When they (other tenants) are not here in August I cannot go anywhere, neither when they leave the house at night. It's not that I work as guard, but when they are not here, I cannot go out. I do my life. But, in the evening if they are not here I cannot go away. I don't pay rent, I pay only gas and electricity. (Sabir, aged 54, Milan)

Gjin, like other participants in this research, has been supported by the landlord during recession period. Their relationship involves a good deal of trust, since Gjin has not been always able to pay monthly rent on time. This trust has been built from the very beginning he entered the new house, and has a reciprocal nature: Gjin could not afford to pay in advance two monthly rents as a deposit, but he exchanged it with his personal work to renovate the apartment he lives now. Gjin example constitutes a *tactical* practice, since it is not durable and it cannot shape structure in any circumstances.

I rent this apartment, but I didn't give any deposit, but I told him (owner) that I could work to renovate it and he accepted. I dismantled any old stuff, I rubbed the floor... When

he came he said “so, now I could sell it”! Sometimes, I pay the rent with delay, but he trusts me (Gjin, aged 34, Athens).

Another *tactic* to limit expenditures is to send children to public nursery schools. In the Italian case, public nursery schools in Milan may cost from 100 to 300 euro per month with respect to family income. Private nursery schools may cost even more, and many immigrants may be obliged to enrol their children in such, due to the limited places in public ones. Hence, migrants in Italy should calculate the payoff of placing a child in a nursery school, when one of the two parents does not work. Isuf could not place his children in the public nursery school, and he has to send them at times to a private one. When he stayed at home, he took care himself of the children, while his wife was working. However, when his wife cannot find profitable (occasional) works, they prefer that she stay at home.

It happens that they (women) go to work for 3 euro (laughs). I pay the private nursery school three euro per hour... my daughter hasn't registered in the public one because she is under 3 years old. It's not worth she go for three euro per hour. She prefers stay at home. (Isuf, aged 39, Milan)

In Greece, children placing in public nursery schools is a free of charge social provision, or in some cases, parents have to pay a token rate. In this case too, places may be limited, so parents have to send their child to private kindergartens. Selection criteria for public structures favour double-income families, whereas single-income families' children are not easily accepted. In the case of construction workers, it is rarely feasible to prove formal employment, due to prevalence of informal working arrangements in the sector and the existence of daily contracts. Both migrants and native builders may find difficulty in convincing school or competent municipality authorities that both parents work, when one of the two work undeclared. However, decisions on children selection may be influenced by discretionality of local officials, or when migrants have developed relationships with competent authorities.

Gjin and Albion are two well-integrated migrants with excellent linguistic skills. They achieved to circumvent barriers posed by legislative provisions and informality in construction, and their children enrolled in public nursery schools. Gjin has been able to explain why he is in a difficult position due to the informality of his job, and he managed to register his child in the nursery school, thanks to also the discretionality of public employee. In a slightly different way, Albion's children enrolled in public nursery school, although Albion is an own-account off-the-books worker. Albion had carried out works for public buildings several times, and he created relationships with the major of the district he resides. In this way, he accomplished to have a favourable treatment by the competent authorities, taking benefit of “*the persistent institutional*

weaknesses that provide fertile ground for rent seeking behaviour on behalf of politicians and public employees” in Greece (ILO, 2016, p. 34). Both examples qualify tactical responses to structural constraints due to their temporariness. It is not sure that they will achieve to do so next another time. However, it is clear that such a practice might hardly be feasible for entrapped migrants with low social capital and linguistic skills.

I have been asked to provide a document from my employer, so they enrol my child in the nursery school. I said to them “guys, I’m working in building sites, we don’t have one employer.” They asked my “why?” I said to them “because we don’t have a stable job, we work 4 days here, 5 days there, 5 days in another place”. She replied “ok, I need to see your welfare stamps”. I got everything and she still asked to me “I need one declaration from your employers”. I had worked some days in Athens, some working days in Tripoli in that month. It wasn’t possible to bring all these declarations. At the end, they accepted to enrol the child. (Gjin, aged 34, Athens)

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All of us (builders) have problems with nursery schools. It’s not possible to demonstrate that you have a formal contract. Fortunately, I know the mayor of (name of satellite municipality of Athens) and they accepted my child in the nursery school. (Albion, aged 41, Athens).

Relying on family members has been another coping practice of jobless Albanian immigrants (Gemi, 2016). As introduced before, many migrants have been sent remittances by their family members. It has been very important for those struggling to make ends meet. This practice has been also confirmed in my research. Several of the study participants related that in hard moments during periods of prolonged unemployment, they have been sent money from their families in Albania or from other family members who are migrants in other countries.

One of my brothers lives in America. Every six months he sends me 500 – 1000 dollars (Gezim, aged 51, Milan)

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When I had remained without money, my brother who lives in Perugia helped me (Gjin, aged 34, Athens)

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[...] now I have been assisted by my father-in-law... the money he gives me, I spent it for my children... things have been so hard today (Azem, aged 46, Athens)

Such practices are nothing less than *survival* responses and expression of solidarity by family and kinship members. Asking for money from family members to overcome economic difficulties is

qualified as a passive action that does not entail any kind of power or nor maneuver. It usually concerns migrants in an *entrapped* situation, when they remain unemployed for long periods. In the above mentioned, Gezim embodies an “entrapped” migrant. He has followed a technical school for building trades in Albania, and he has always worked as carpenter. During the crisis, he became many times unemployed, and he usually accomplishes to find job through Albanian community members. In his free time, his language skills are quite poor after 18 years since migration, and he does not socialize with Italians, because “*it’s difficult to have Italian friends. Even when they play the cards, they don’t play with Albanians. They always play the same games.... or, they play “scopa” (Italian card game), or they don’t know to play well*”. His wife has always worked as domestic worker, whereas he usually receives money from his brother who lives in the US. On the other hand, not only migrants with low social and cultural capital might ask for money from family or kinship member, but such *survival* practice may involve *expectant* migrants who have remained jobless for long periods due to stagnation in the residential construction.

Family members can be not only a source of direct financial assistance, but rather their contribution may also have an indirect character. Muzafer, like many other participants in both contexts, sends his children during the summer months in Albania to stay with their grandparents or uncles and aunts. Adopting this tactic, household expenses are reduced during the summer months.

Every summer I send the children to their grandparents. It certainly delights both grandparents and my children, but it’s also a way to save some money. (Muzafer, aged 42, Athens)

Last but not least, in an effort to earn some money, some of my respondents decide to sell some tools that they do not use anymore. In this way, they have received some money to cover basic needs. Other extreme cases concern people engaged in collecting metal objects from the garbage and sell it to informal purchasers. Such practices qualify survival responses to cases of extreme poverty.

5.2.2 Collective actors’ assistance

The importance of collective actors’ actions in immigrants’ integration and insertion in the labour markets has been recognized by a number of studies (see for instance Ambrosini, 2016). Civil society actors such as ethnic associations, NGOs, social movements, trade Unions and religious organizations have played a crucial role in migrants’ settlement, as they may influence policies;

provide practical, or even material contribution, such as legal services to irregular migrants (for instance to inform on their rights), or shelter and food.

During the economic recession, collective actors have taken many initiatives to provide help to unemployed citizens, either by supplying them with vital goods to survive, or assisting their reinsertion in the labour market; both in the Greek and Italian context. In migration studies, the action of these systems of solidarity and intermediation have supported agency of irregular and precarious migrant workers (Datta *et al.*, 2007; Ambrosini, 2016). Nowadays, the contribution of these actors becomes even more significant because of the thousands of unemployed migrant workers whose financial condition has deteriorated.

In recent studies, migrants seem to turn more and more to collective actors due to the lack of stable employment, and the risk to lapse into irregularity. As for immigrants' coping practices in Italy, they have usually contacted secular and religious organizations for any kind of help (Sacchetto and Vianello, 2016). Focusing on Romanian and Moroccan immigrants' strategies, the authors illustrate how migrants have received assistance from various collective actors, putting at the same time emphasis on how social norms may condition such interactions. In particular, the authors show that while Moroccans have enjoyed the charitable system of their Muslim community, Romanians as Orthodox do not opt to ask help from Catholic churches neither from Catholic organizations as Caritas, that would stigmatize them as poor.

Some of my respondents seem to be unaware of the action of such collective actors. Most of Albanians consider that only poor citizens in a disgraceful state may seek help through such organizations. Only one Albanian worker, Valon, admitted that he has received assistance from associations or organizations. Valon is an active member of the Builders' Trade Union in his district in Athens. He participates in reunions and he contributes in initiatives of collecting and distributing apparel and food to all those who need it. At the same time, Valon himself is one of those who are in need of assistance. However, he finds being offered free food and clothes quite embarrassing, and when he receives such an assistance, he prefers that not everyone be aware of it.

[...] I had the food from the soup kitchens organized by the trade union.... but, I didn't go there, I didn't do it... because of dignity.. due to the pride we have.. and since they (trade unionists) know me, I didn't want to go myself but they (trade unionists) brought it at my home (smiles embarrassed).... I have at times taken some clothes as well...who would have imagined that I myself would need the clothes we had collected... (Valon, aged 44, Athens).

Like Valon, also another participant received assistance by collective actors. Leka has remained unemployed for many years and he gets through thanks to his wife's employment. Since Leka lives in the same neighbourhood as I did, when I carried out the fieldwork, I was informed that his family has at times received clothes for their children from the Orthodox Church. However, when Leka was interviewed, he did not refer anything in this regard.

Valon and Leka are two of my respondents who incarnate the type of *entrapped* migrant. Valon is 44 years old and Leka is 54 years old. Both of them have worked as carpenters and have admitted that they do not feel able to work professionally within other building trades. Both Valon and Leka's wives have worked as domestic workers, and become the main breadwinners of the household during the crisis. Both of them receive assistance from collective actors or institutional actors (next paragraph). With regard to their social ties, Valon seems to socialize only with dependent workers (individuals who belong to working class) that has constrained his opportunities (Chapter 3). Leka is not such a sociable individual, and he prefers to pass his time with his family and other family members. Such practices can be characterized as *survival*, since it entails in a passive acceptance of help with respect to basic needs.

My findings are in accordance with what Sacchetto and Vianello (2016) argued about Romanian migrants. Turning to secular or religious organization may be considered as stigmatization for migrants workers as poor people. This fear of stigmatization may be explained by several factors. First, Albanian builders might feel that their masculinity is wounded by going to soup kitchens. Thiel (2007, p.246) argues that bodies are the sources of builders' power, knowledge, status and income. Asking for assistance may be considered as a personal failure that can implicate builders' identity and "*masculine culture linked to their economic, social and political positions*". This seems extremely relevant to Albanian working class culture that is embedded on notions of masculinity (Van Boeschoten, 2015). Second, the admission of receiving assistance by collective actors could mean a failure of the migration experience that might trigger further physiological distress to migrant workers. Third, it is also possible that interviewees did not want to reveal such an information to me, as it is generally considered as a humiliating action.

What it is worth noting here is that the vast majority of my respondents expressed disdain, and in some cases, even repugnance for secular organizations' actions. Albanians' (non-)involvement in migrant associations and NGOs has been already discussed by Iosifides and colleagues (2007). The authors state that migrants' low participation in associations is due to the fragmented nature of these organization and migrants' representations of their ineffectiveness. In this respect, Zachou and Kalerante (2010) confirm this view, although arguing that the nature of Albanian associations in Greece is being transformed; from closed groups of individuals originated from

the same regions in Albanian, to more open entities that respect individual initiative. The same can be said for the Albanian community in Italy, since it seems that only few migrants consider Albanian associations and secular organizations as reliable sources of assistance (Mai and Paladini, 2013). Albanian migrants usually resort to family and friends' networks when they need information and support to circumvent structural constraints.

The quotes of Adnan, Armend, Ramiz and Beqir show how Albanians depreciate the actions of collective actors and avoid any contact with them.

ID: have you ever asked assistance from some association? Even to seek for advices for your documents?

A: for whatever you need, you can ask the lawyer. They are the only who really help us. (Adnan, aged 40, Athens)

~

R: Here, there are many Albanians' associations, but they are not at a good level. These are who really need our help; not we ourselves from them. For this reason, we always go to lawyers. (Ramiz, aged 48, Athens).

~

ID: have you ever asked any help from Albanian association or ...

A: No, never! All they do was nothing but propaganda. They are "commissioned" by politicians in Albania. [...] they are crooks. They will ask you money for anything at a second stage... for lawyers, for whatever... they'll ask you 1000 euro, 500 euro... (Armend, aged 43, Athens)

~

ID: Have you ever asked for help from associations or...

B: No, I've never been helped by anyone but acquaintances. That's all! (Beqir, aged 27, Milan)

The above quotes demonstrate how Albanian migrants' representations of collective actors drive them to rely quite exclusively on family networks; or, at least, they seek to represent themselves in this way to the interviewer. It may be assumed that this suspicion against collective organizations might be inherited by Albanians' communist past, in the sense that it is reproduced by Albanian citizens' suspicion towards the state. In the Greek case, Gemi (2013) points out that contacts with civil society institutions are characterized by a high level of suspiciousness reciprocally. Albanian migrants' suspicion against collective actors was confirmed by three representatives of immigrant associations too.

The point is that they do not believe that the service is for free; because they cannot get used to this idea. Let me put it in another way. Even if we do voluntary work, they still want to pay. In my opinion, they pay the lawyers for nothing. We have five lawyers who offer free advices, but they still prefer to go to private professionals... maybe it's a question of habit... (Immigrant association representative, 23/6/2016, Athens)

~

We offer legal support, but it's a pity that they don't come to us. The main problem is their regularization, and they don't take benefit of these free services. [...] we (Albanians) have a Balkan mentality let's say, we have distrust inside us. (Immigrant association representative, 21/5/2016, Athens)

~

[...] the Albanian community is not easily reachable or available...it is not like the South American community, or the Chinese or Philippine community, which are easily accessible. [...] doing research also on the Albanian community is not always easy. [...] Albanians do not easily gather together (Immigrant association representative, 11/2/2016, Milan)

It comes therefore that Albanians' predisposition towards collective actors is rather negative, and their interaction with collective groups seems quite problematic. Even if the majority of my respondents have never participated in any association, their negative representations are based on their masculine cultures, suspicion towards collective initiative as a sediment of the communist past, and as a symbolic practice of resistance to the idea of failure. These beliefs not only constrain their agency, but it results in the erosion of their income, when they have to rely on lawyers. As I show in the next section, institutional actors have hardly contributed to alleviate immigrants from crisis effects.

5.2.3 Institutional actors' assistance

Literature on individuals' coping practices within constraining economic contexts, it has been illustrated how social actors adopt non-market economic practices to claim state benefits or subsidies provided by local authorities (Smith and Stenning, 2006). In this sense, state benefits have been considered as "pillars" that underpin family's income (Meurs, 2002). In migration studies, many migrants have claimed benefits from state or municipal authorities, as a coping practices in big cities (see for instance Datta *et al.*, 2007). This response seems to be of greater relevance during current economic recession. Sacchetto and Vianello (2013) and Ambrosini and colleagues (2014) have shed light on the "claiming benefits" practice, adopted from both native

and migrant unemployed population. In the Greek context, although the great number of subsidies were abolished during the last years in both countries, unemployed individuals have sought to take benefit of any subsidy to ensure a decent living. Focusing on economic recession impacts on welfare state, Matsaganis (2013) has illustrated the benefit cuts as mean to limit public expenditures. Apart from pensions and unemployment benefits cuts, the suspension of rent subsidy in 2010 represented a major hazard to migrant receivers, as now there is not any social housing program. However, in 2016, the Greek government introduced an emergency program to support the income of low-income families providing the “solidarity card”. The recipients were entitled to food stamps, and energy and rent subsidies. In this case too, such an allowance qualifies as survival practice, since it contributes to meeting basic needs.

Many of my respondents have claimed this subsidy as a *survival* practice to sustain their income, whereas others opted not to apply for it in order to not be labelled as “poor people”. In this respect, even if Gjini remained for several months and unemployed, depended upon his wife’s employment, and received, periodically, economic assistance by his brother in Italy in the past, he did not opt to apply for the allowance. Since 2015, he has been working in a continuous way, although usually totally undeclared. Applying for allowances seems to him as an action that could stigmatize him as a poor person. His saying “*I’m still healthy*” is related to the power of his body. It remains a source that permits him to have a decent living without being stigmatized as one who is need of food stamps. Once again, builders’ economic action seem to be embedded on cultural beliefs.

Tsipras (Greek prime minister) be blessed! He gives us this assistance against humanitarian crisis as it’s called now. Until now, no other government has done so!
(Leka, aged 54, Athens)

~

I prefer to go to work for 20 euro, instead of applying for the rent subsidy... I’ll never do it. I’m not a lazy. I wake up at 6.15am and go to work. I have been said to apply for the card.. it’s 200 euro for the supermarket. I don’t want to do it, there are other people need it more. I’m healthy and I can raise my children. [...] I feel compassion for Greece, I really pity Greece. I don’t want to return back (Gjini, aged 34, Athens)

With regard to the Italian welfare system, it seems that it has been more generous than the Greek one. A significant difference for unemployed migrant builders in the two countries is the access to redundancy pay and unemployment benefits. Especially in construction, formal workers are entitled to a series of income support programs for fired workers. A trade union officer relates:

There are several phases for those who lose their job, but it depends on the size of the company. In large companies that exceed 15-20 employees, trade unions have achieved to improve the agreement through social cushioning systems (ammortizzatori sociali). First, to use the ordinary subsidized temporary lay-off scheme, second the extraordinary subsidized temporary lay-off scheme, third, for some of them, there was a remuneration of the wage guarantee Fund in derogations (cassa integrazione deroga), and then there were the procedures of mobility and of unemployment benefits at the end. When a worker was lucky, he was entitled to 4 years of unemployment allowances. However, it was not always like this, since most of the workers are employed by companies of smaller dimensions. Those are entitled to one year or one year and a half unemployment benefit that is extended to two years, thanks to the introduction of the new unemployment scheme (Nuova prestazione di Assicurazione Sociale per l'Impiego, NASpI) (Trade Unionist, 29/5/2015, Milan)

Several of the study participants in Milan stated that they have enjoyed state benefits during the last years. It is true that only few people managed to receive benefits for 4 years, but the majority of the fired workers have been entitled to one-year employment benefits. On the contrary, Albanian workers in the Greek construction sector, if so, have received allowances only for few months due to the inexistence of formal employment contracts, and the practice to be declared for the minimum number of working days required to renew their stay permit or health card (Chapter 5).

Finally, some migrants have been benefited from the social housing program in Italian cities. Luftar remained unemployed for one year and a half. He received the unemployment benefit for almost one year, while he was seeking to find a new job. His wife had a full-time job, but they hardly made ends meet every month. They registered in the lists of social housing program, and after almost two years, they were finally selected to move in a social house in the municipality where they were used to reside. As Luftar recounts below, the key element that contributed to become beneficiary of the new house was the good relationship he had developed with his ex-landlord, and the pro-migrant orientation of the local authorities. At some point, he could not afford to pay the monthly rent anymore. He asks his employer to evict him so he had better possibilities³² to be granted social housing. As regard the eviction procedure, it is not such a simple matter, since it entails in getting a lawyer to draft the eviction report and present it to the judge. Such practice can be seen as a *tactical* practice, since this subject has utilized his social

³² In most cases, selection criteria on social housing give priority to: i) single-income families, ii) those who have been evicted, and iii) with small number of minor family members (up to 2 children).

ties to enjoy a cheaper accommodation. The “space” does not belong to him, but he took advantage of his cunning to access social housing programs.

My ex landlord was not so rigid. [...] it occurred that I didn't pay the monthly rates on time, but he was very comprehensive. After almost two years of unemployment, I said to him “you have to do me a favour, I paid you up to a certain point until now, but I can not afford it anymore. You have to give me the eviction notice”, because if you have the eviction notice, it's a further evidence (to meet the selection criteria). At some point, he understood that I wasn't really able to pay him and he sent me the eviction notice. In this way, I managed to be ranked much higher in their lists. After two years of appeals, I got the house. It wasn't simple at all. I had to go to the judge to prove that I need that house. (Luftar, aged 54, Milan).

5.2.4 Occupational mobility and opportunities for new employment

A large body of literature stresses the importance of social actors' occupational mobility as a way to face crisis effects. Here, emphasis is put on the channels through which unemployed individuals seek a new employment. As introduced in Chapter 3, information on job opportunities circulate usually through informal networks; quite exclusively for low-skilled and low-educated individuals (Granovetter, 1995). In this sense, informal social ties are of great relevance for immigrant job-seekers in low-skilled professions, because informal networks may act as a shield against discrimination from the host society, and favour the insertion of irregular migrants in the labour market (Portes, 1998). Formal channels such as employment centres, temporary labour agencies or newspapers have been less significant for migrant job-seekers, due to the latter's lack of knowledge of the local language and legislation.

Studies on immigrants' coping strategies during the economic crisis have shown how informal networks remain the most important channel through which jobless immigrants gain information for opportunities in the labour market (Sacchetto and Vianello, 2013; Ambrosini *et al.*, 2014). However, Sacchetto and Vianello (2013) underline that different migrant groups may use their networks in various ways. For instance, Moroccans seem to rely exclusively on community networks, a fact which appears to be restrictive in job research. Differently, Romanians usually ask information from a less numerous, but more heterogeneous set of contacts, and they manage to access new employment opportunities more efficiently. Furthermore, both research surveys highlight the importance of formal recruitment channels for unemployed migrants. In this sense, more and more migrants seem to rely on temporary work agencies and public employment

centres, even if Italian public services cannot yet be regarded as effective in matching supply and demand for workforce (Ambrosini *et al.*, 2014). Interestingly, some unemployed migrants have managed to return to the labour market thanks to formation courses to improve their employability (de Luca, 2014). According to Zucchetti (2005, p.213) employability is defined as a set individual characteristics such as professional skills, experience and social skills, that make the worker suitable to carry out a specific job.

As already argued, the interviewed Albanian migrants maintain that they largely rely on family and friend networks when seeking employment. All of my respondents who changed occupation during the economic crisis found that new job through informal networks. From the empirical material collected, it appears that the majority of Albanians in Greece who exit the construction sector are now concentrated in catering and tourism sector, whereas those in Italy have found employment in the same sectors as well; but, it seems to be a larger variety of options in the Italian context. These findings are in contrast to other research that claimed a return of many migrants to agriculture professions (see for instance IOM, 2010; Maroukis *et al.*, 2011; Maroukis, 2013; Devitt 2013).

An interesting point raised from the empirical material was the selectivity with regard to new professions. In particular, many of my respondents have uttered disparaging words about some colleagues' employment choices. Avni is father of two children and has remained unemployed for long periods during the last years. Only recently, he managed to find an occasional job in construction, while his wife continued to work in a restaurant throughout the recession period. Avni has never been employed in any other sector than construction:

Since you cannot work as a builder, you have to change profession. I see many Albanians change profession. One becomes gardener, the other works in restaurant as dishwasher. A man to do dishwashing! "I work as a dishwasher for 3 euro per hour" said to me a guy....guardians .. whatever you can imagine! (Avni, aged 34, Athens)

"The builders' cultures were embedded in a form of physical masculinity" (Thiel, 2007, p. 228). Avni's representation of dishwashing jobs seems to be embedded on body-centred nature of building trades. Thiel (2013) also states that mental labour, or jobs traditionally divided by gender (such as dishwashing), may signal the feminization of colleagues' actions. For my respondents, it seems even more relevant; Albanian builders' culture has been built upon corporeal masculinity and gender division of labour. In addition, it can be argued that migrant builders have developed a strong work identity that may deprive them from job opportunities. Looking at Valon and Mentor's saying, it can be argued that all these attribute may constrain social actors' capacity to find a new job.

I don't do anything else than carpenter. This is my job. Yes, I go to work as gardener but these are not (considered) jobs. I am 44 years old now. I'm in my best period of live to work... my heart works, my hands work...if I don't work now, when I am supposed to work? In my sixties? (Valon, aged 44, Athens)

~

I had said to myself that I can do any work, but not to go to open markets. But, I worked for 2 months at the open markets. I liked it, I have to say. You have to wake up early to load and unload the minivan... (Mentor, aged 37, Athens)

With respect to temporary labour agencies, my respondents' representations are largely negative. As analysed in Chapter 3, labour agencies in Greece are mainly active in the hospital sector and cleaning services (Maroukis, 2016). None of my interviewees has ever relied on labour agencies to find a job. On the other hand, the majority of my respondents in Italy have usually used labour agencies to find a job during the economic crisis. However, the search results were rather discouraging. Labour agencies do not seem to offer reliable job opportunities for Albanian migrants either in construction (Chapter 3), or in any other sector.

Failure to find jobs through formal channels seems to be embedded on patterns of their migration and getting a job. Albanian migrants have traditionally relied on close-knit networks to both arrive in Italy and find a job in local labour markets. Reliance on family and friends networks has been shaped and conditioned by the job recruitment process in construction. As already analysed in Chapter 3, getting a job in construction demands the existence of informal social ties; formal channels have rarely been used. This seems even more relevant for those in Athens because of the communal character of work in construction (Psimmenos, 2003) and limited role of labour agencies in the Greek labour market.

The same reasons can be claimed to interpret Albanian migrants' failure to find new job through institutional channels. In this sense, De Luca (2014) has shown how unemployed migrants have changed career through training received by municipality programs³³ in Italy. Even if it appears crucial for Albanian migrants to increase their employability, it was not the case for my respondents. Only two of my respondents were aware of such programs, and they have also sought a new employment through the employment centre. In the Greek context, there was a total lack of information about such programs. The only mechanism that some Albanian migrants have

³³ Provinces in Lombardy can give an individual contribution called "Job Grant" (Sostegno della dote Lavoro DL). These program may improve unemployed individuals' employability and encourage their social integration and re-insertion in the labour market (Coletto and Guglielmi, 2014).

taken benefit of seems to be the 8-month municipal European subsidized projects for street sweepers, although these trades were not in accordance with their work identities.

Many of us have been employed in municipalities as street sweepers. It was the program for those who remained unemployed for many months. I cannot consider it a job... but it was the only solution... it was only for eight months. After that, what can I do? (Tariq, aged 61, Athens)

Such options may be characterised *as tactical* as they do not last much. They constitute temporary solutions undertaken by social actors with a certain level of linguistic skills and good information about public programmes for unemployed people.

Change career initiatives might be taken individually to increase employability in sectors where the demand is relatively high. During periods of prolonged unemployment, migrants may make use of this time to acquire new skills. Even if such competences may not be used immediately, may prove to be valuable in the future. Skender relates:

S: I remained nine months without any job. I obtained the driving license for lorries. I was stand for long time... I had the time to study... (I opted it for) just to have something more in my pocket (a new certificate).

ID: did you have any specific plan when you decided to get the license?

S: No, in the sense that I had been informed that there was demand for drivers.... So, I decided to get the license... I haven't need it until now, but who knows? (Skender, aged 41, Milan)

Another factor that may enable immigrants to change career is to benefit from their past expertise. Pellumb has been recently employed as warehouse worker at a supermarket. He achieved to get this job through information received by a friend of him, although the decisive factor appears to be his skills to drive a forklift. Other participants have accounted that older work experience in various sector permitted them to re-enter in the labour market, by activating old acquaintances.

I was used to drive a forklift even if I have no license. I remember that an ex-employer demanded that I drove different vehicles. Now, I use the forklift in the warehouse. (Pellumb, aged 48, Athens)

~

I called many friends when I remained unemployed. I made it to work as a cook or a waiter in different places, but not in a continuous way. (Lavdrim, aged 29, Athens)

Under these circumstances, it can be assumed that Albanian builders may follow new career paths by utilizing past expertise in specific sectors, and re-activate old acquaintances. It may be considered a tactic to escape long-term unemployment in construction. New employment opportunities usually concern precarious employment and, it rarely involves social mobility.

A reliable alternative for those opting to change career seems to be self-employment. Although I did not interview Albanian self-employed workers in Milan, some empirical evidence from the Greek context suggests that immigrants have invested in business that do not require high skills (cleaning sector), or have started up new business based on skills acquired in the past. New business may also be related to sectors where Albanian immigrants are concentrated, as in cleaning services. The two examples below are of high relevance:

I had a problem with my lower back, and I give up the building sites. I opened a butcher shop. I worked as a butcher in Kalamata from 1991 to 1997. I spent 25,000 euro for this shop. I knew the job, but I started up the business in the worst period. It's a matter of question too. Some people are racist and may say 'I don't go to buy from him, because he's Albanian. [...] even if I cannot stand (economically) I will go to the building sites again.. or I will become a cleaner (Arbnor, aged 41, Athens)

~

I started up a cleaning services business. I knew many people working in this sector and I decided to make a new start [...] to be honest, it does bother me the fact that I don't work as a carpenter... Now, I'm not so satisfied from this job, because we work very much, but we're not paid on time. (Fatlum, aged 35, Athens)

It might be assumed therefore that migrant workers who had acquired various skills in the past could utilize now their cultural capital in order to follow a different career path as dependent or self-employed workers. High level of social capital and adequate financial capital may be considered as necessary requirements for those opting to start up a business. In this point, it would be useful to turn to the typology proposed for Albanian migrants. Fatlum is 35 years old and represents a *dynamic* migrant. As already presented, he is running a business in cleaning sector, and he has an adequate financial capital that also permitted him to open another business in the past in Albania (without much success – already closed). At the same time, he is able to undertake repair works in private houses as off-the-books own-account worker in Athens by virtue of his bridging social capital, his continuous formation on the use of new building materials, his proficiency in Greek and good communication skills. Having also assisted by his wife's employment, he is considering now to move to Germany “*when the conditions are right*”, as I show below.

5.2.5 Wife's employment and household division of labour

In the previous sections, I have shed light on Albanian males' practices to cope with the economic recession. Migrant males have been able to confront crisis effects, developing various individual or family responses. However, what it should not be disregarded is the role of the females in Albanian households economies.

In the European labour market, women did not seem to constitute the population harder hit by the current economic crisis; rather, the "buffers" of this crisis have been young people with temporary contract and migrants labourers (Bettio *et al.*, 2012, p. 12). Indeed, research on economic crisis effects on Greek labour market has shown that recession hit men more than women, whereas unemployment rates were higher for migrant workers than Greeks (Triandafyllidou *et al.*, 2013). Differently to these results, it has been suggested that the most affected categories by the crisis in Italy seem to be the less-educated people, the women and the immigrants, although migrant females have resisted in a more efficient way, because they are usually employed in domestic and care sectors that are less exposed to market fluctuations (Ambrosini *et al.*, 2014).

In either way, economic crisis and low demand for migrant male workforce seem to have changed the role of the man as breadwinner³⁴ in many households. In Greece, this phenomenon has been discussed in recent studies on Albanian women's working patterns in the domestic sector. Maroukis and colleagues (2011) have observed how Albanian those women working as live-out domestic workers became the breadwinners, by crossing the Greek-Albanian borders on a daily basis. In this way, Albanian women did not only manage to supplement the family income, but they developed a worker identity (Psimmenos and Skamnakis, 2008; Maroukis, 2009) and gained access to social rights. Consequently, male migrants who lapsed into irregularity might renew their stay permits through their wives' employment.

Another interesting dimension of female employment as live-out domestic workers is the fact that Albanian women created a social network that in times of crisis seems to be of extreme importance. Both in Italy and Greece, direct and daily contact with native employers and host society gave them the opportunity to extend their personal network and to develop their cultural capital by learning better the national language and to access the local culture (Maroukis *et al.*, 2011; Vathi, 2015). However, it should not be considered a straightforward process, since

³⁴ The breadwinner concept in the European context dates back to the Victorian days (Dugbazah, 2007). At those times, male family members produced income and had all the responsibilities to provide all needs of the family. Wives' work was not permitted at all, and women were responsible for home chores and children and elderly care.

Albanian males have not always allowed their wives to socialize with native people, considering this practice as a “shield” against Western societies’ values that were entirely in contrast to the their patriarchal values (Vathi, 2015).

Here, it is important to recall that cultural elements of Albanians have definitely shaped their emigration patterns, and they have been reproduced in immigrant families. The patriarchal character of the vast majority of Albanian families influenced migration patterns, since the man was the family member who emigrated first; and, then the women followed him to the host country. Making use of the right to family reunification, wives and children joined Albanian males in Greece or Italy, being usually dependent on their husband’s employment to renew their stay permit as well. Division of gender roles have been also found within Albanian households, since it should be the men who would be the breadwinner, who work out of the home, whereas the women would have the responsibility for home chores and the children raising (Vathi, 2015).

Economic crisis hit predominantly males’ professions and posed therefore risks to migrant household viability, not only in terms of financial troubles, but also with the respect to the maintenance of regular stay permit for those who had not acquired the EU citizenship or a long-term stay permit. In this respect, Gemi (2013) highlights the “de-regularization” process in the sense that many male migrants failed to renew theirs and their families’ regular documents, since they could not prove formal employment. As a result, in many cases, women’s employment allowed the renewal of stay permits for all family members. In the Greek case, this development was favoured by the introduction of a voucher system of payment (*ergosimo*, Art. 20 of L.3863/2010) that permitted the domestic workers regularization, even retroactively (Maroukis and Gemi, 2013).

In looking at my respondents’ narratives, the above assumptions on the role of the breadwinner within Albanian household are confirmed here. This pattern has been more often claimed by Albanians in Greece, rather than from Albanian residents in Milan; it might be attributed to the fact that the unemployment periods for the first category have been rather longer and more frequent with respect to the research subjects in the Italian context. Gjin and Albion recount:

Since 2013, I was (my incomes) almost zero. I didn’t work even one month.... So much trouble... fortunately, my wife worked, otherwise I had to turn to Albania (Albion, aged 51, Milan)

~

[...] in 2010, 2011 bugger is happening! No work at all! [...] fortunately, my wife was working in a bakery. She was hired regularly so we didn’t have problems with the

documents. I stayed at home to take care of the children. [...] it was risky to go anywhere else that period. (Gjin, aged 34, Greece)

From the above quotes, it may be assumed that women take over the role of breadwinner, when they are able to find work opportunities in the local labour markets. These opportunities do not only permit to maintain an income of subsistence, but women's labour may have a decisive role in renewing family members' stay permits. However, economic crisis has led not only to a change with respect to the predominant role of male breadwinner, rather it may implicate a redistribution of home tasks between husband and wife. In other words, it is not only about changing roles in the income production, but rather it concerns the change in the division of labour in the home. Avni relates:

In the last 7 years, we've been destroyed. The builders - one thousand per cent! ... I tell you – live from their wives (income), that is the women work, and we care the children. Whatever they tell you it's a lie! We live thanks to women's work (Avni, aged 34, Athens)

Division of childcare and labour in the home was also revealed in other research in Italy (Ambrosini *et al.*, 2015). The authors have shown that in cases in which women became the breadwinners, unemployed males have taken over the childcare, and in some cases also the cleaning tasks in the home. This finding may be also relevant for migrant families in which division of labour in the home is quite rigid.

The same it can be said also for Albanian families. Even if unemployed Albanian males' masculinities might be wounded (Van Boeschoten, 2015) because of women's labour contribution to family income, it is apparent that many Albanian men have participated on a regular basis in household cares. However, this mutation may pose risks for women's safety, since domestic violence against women may constitute a buffer for Albanian men who failed "to accomplish their culturally expected roles of protectors and main breadwinners" (Poteyeva and Wasileski, 2016). Studying phenomena of domestic violence against Albanian women in Greece, the authors claim that cases of intimate partner violence have increased during the economic crisis. Even though empirical material of the two case studies do not confirm such evidences, problematic situations in Albanian migrants' home seem to be a reality.

Most of my colleagues remained at home. There are many tussles, grumbling, problems... The men take care of the children and the women try to find occasional daily jobs anywhere (Agim, aged 40, Athens)

Women's employment and redistribution of home tasks in Albanian households may constitute tactical responses to males' unemployment. Not only women provide income, but they also manage to maintain family members' regular status. This response is temporary, because it can affect male's mental health, and in turn, it may consist in domestic violence or mental diseases. In addition, it may entail risks as male builder may lose opportunities to carry out occasional jobs that may induce social network weakening. Having illustrated various practices undertaken by jobless migrants in both host countries, I shift attention to tactics related to transnational spaces.

5.3 Transnational labour mobility to cope with unemployment

Before analyzing how Albanian migrants employ mobility practices to resist to unemployment and insecurity in Athens and Milan, it is important to introduce the notion of "mobility power" conceptualized by Smith (2006, p.391) as the "*internal expression of high labour turnover*". To study migrants' mobility strategies, the author suggests focusing on the borders policies and the implications that immigrant status might have on social actors' agency. Mobility power can be seen as a practice of resistance within the workplace, and it may be constrained by regime of migration controls. On the other hand, it has been argued that temporary jobs and flexibility in the labour market can be utilized by low-skilled transnational migrants to develop skills, exit difficult situations or gain time (Alberti, 2016). Furthermore, it is worth recall the prevalence of informal working arrangements in the construction sector. Buckley (2012) argues that competition by multinational contractors, decline of trade unions' power, and wide subcontracting of labour have been accompanied by further informalization of the production. Under these circumstances, immigrant workers may find themselves working totally uninsured and without any formal contract (Williams *et al.*, 2012).

With respect to contemporary migration patterns of Albanians, it is necessary to keep always in mind the change ushered in by the agreement between Albania and Schengen Area Countries. Since December 2011, Schengen visa restrictions were lifted for Albanian citizens conferring them the right to travel within the Schengen zone with a tourist visa lasting up to 3 months. However, Albania's alignment to the Schengen Treaty does not provide the right to work to every Albanian citizen, but rather this right may be enjoyed only by long-term EU permit holders, and, naturally, by those who have acquired an EU country's citizenship.

In the case of Greece, only few Albanian migrants' have obtained the right to work in other EU countries, since the number of those obtained the Greek citizenship or the long-term resident's permit remain low (Maroukis, 2013; Gemi, 2016). According to the Greek Ministry of Interior

(2017), from 2006 to 2016 some 16,000 foreigners acquired the Greek citizenship, whereas the corresponding figure of foreigners of ethnic Greek decent was almost 120,000 (Chapter 1). There have been also many cases of Albanians who lapsed into irregularity, and, as a result, they could not apply for the long-term stay permit, let alone for the citizenship (Gemi, 2013; Maroukis, 2013). In the Italian case, the percentage of Albanians who have the right to move to another EU country and look for job is higher (Gemi, 2016). According to the Italian Ministry of Labour (2015), some 80,000 Albanians have acquired the Italian citizenship by 2015.

Travelling without visa requirements within the Schengen space has been the first step for many immigrants towards their insertion in local labour markets, once their countries joined the EU (Torre, 2013), or as a way to find work in the informal economy, over-staying the visas (Çağlar, 2013). In this sense, Mai and Paladini (2013) have argued that many Albanians saw very favourably the Schengen visa relaxation, since they would have the possibility to maintain the links with their families easier, and to explore the Schengen countries' labour market, without being constrained by strict legislation on the issue of stay permits. Changes in the Schengen regulations have also be connected to the phenomenon of circular migration (Castagnone, *et al.*, 2007; Torre, 2013). In particular, circular migration patterns, as a means to increase the income and explore employment opportunities, are favoured by relaxation of visa restrictions. It comes therefore that mobility is conditioned and shaped by migration laws or supra-national regimes (Castles and Miller, 2009).

Recent economic recession had a significant impact on migrant workers' households both in Italy and Greece. The negative effects were even more acute for those employed in construction, in which unemployment rates were significantly high. As already presented, many Albanian migrants from Greece opted to return back to Albanian, whereas this number was smaller for those residing in Italy. Under these circumstances, unemployed or underemployed migrants have made efforts to get back out again in order to continue residing in the country of destination. Since the little time they can afford to be unemployed (Reyneri, 2010), construction migrants responded with further geographical transnational mobility. In the next paragraphs, I illustrate the struggle of Albanian migrants to create new transnational spaces to cope with crisis effects.

5.3.1 Creating new transnational spaces

Labour geography scholars have mostly focused on the agency of unionised workers' spatial mobility, but agency of unorganised temporary migrants workers has been usually omitted (Rogaly, 2009). Even if Rogaly has casted light on manifestations and nature of such agency, here

the aim is not to analyse migrants' practices at the workplace, but to illustrate how Albanian builders follow transnational routes to work and explore new labour markets.

As introduced in Chapter 1, migrants' mobility is a dynamic process embedded on social actors' individual characteristics such as age, family status, channels of mobility, statuses and time-frame of migration (Pugliese, 1995; King, 2002). In this section, I demonstrate how Albanian construction workers use their mobility towards other countries of Western Europe to generate higher incomes and/or to explore employment opportunities and possibility for permanent settlement. In doing so, I use the concepts of '*mental maps*' and '*geography of needs*' introduced by Morrison and Sacchetto (2014, p.39). The authors define migrants' '*mental map*' as a "*variety of options in terms of mobility and work [...] built around their needs and aspirations and highlights how the institutions that allow their fruition are scattered in a transnational space*". The term '*geography of needs*' is referred to the social spaces where migrants' needs are pursued, and are located in specific geographical areas that migrants create based on their aspirations.

Introducing these concepts, Morrison and colleagues (2013; 2014) studied Moldovan and Ukrainian workers' mobility between Russia and Italy. The authors explored migrants' individual and collective forms of agency and resistance by focusing on transnational and class dimensions, overcoming barriers illustrated by literature on ethnic transnational communities³⁵ or industrial relations scholarship³⁶. In doing so, they revealed how migrants' labour mobility allowed the pursuit of stable working arrangements in the country of destination; the broadening of their skills and expectations; to reconstruct their identity; to reconcile their job with the family needs.

Concerning Albanian migrants' mobility, Gemi (2014; 2016) has noted a rupture in transnational practices of Albanians in Italy and Greece due to the economic situation in these two countries and the home country. This discontinuity mainly entails in the decreasing availability of capitals to sustain development and business activities in Albania. According to the author, the flows of remittances to Albania have significantly decreased, and as a result, migrants could not continue their practices of transnational dimension such as building home in their home country, financing family economic activities, undertaking trade activities. On the contrary, many of them (mainly from Greece) decided to return temporarily (with or without their families) in their country of

³⁵ The authors are referred to studies on transnational communities with a special focus on ethnic identity (see for instance Schiller and Caglar, 2009), rather on transnational social spaces. In this case, ethnicity and cultural ties are in the center of transnational movements, whereas class, gender and national dimensions have a residual importance.

³⁶ In industrial relations literature, scholars (see for instance Lillie and Greer, 2007) have usually paid more attention on the macro-level, that is the features of globalized labour market, rather on social actors' agency and interactions within the workplace.

origin, being in a status of limbo, or moving back and forth to carry out occasional jobs in order to sustain their family income.

Furthermore, Maroukis (2013) and Gemi (2014; 2016) have assumed that some Albanian migrants in Greece and Italy would opt to move towards industrial European countries in order to seek for employment opportunities. Such an assumption may be confirmed from the findings of the next sections related to Albanians mobility towards other European or global destinations. However, before this pattern becomes a reality, a common practice is to explore the local labour market in the new country of destination by working occasionally or temporarily in the informal economy.

Transnational practices to explore new migratory resettlement destinations: from Italy and Greece to new European destinations

Poor living and working conditions in the country of origin may trigger labour mobility (Papastergiadis, 2000). In this respect, Albanians started to map in their minds new migratory trajectories to escape from poverty and unemployment in both destination countries, as well as in Albania. At a first stage, migrants' mental maps are built upon the need to explore job opportunities in other Western European countries, with a view to re-emigrate permanently and work in a more prosperous labour market.

[...] we were sleeping, we were living in a dream, but, suddenly, you woke up. You're terrified and think: what I do now? Where to go? Belgium, Netherlands, Germany [...] I've gone several times abroad. I went to Belgium to a friend of mine to check out the situation. I'm a good head of family; I can't take the whole family with me, just like many others do. Getting the family and going anywhere? No! I should explore first the new country, and then I'll see. [...] I couldn't say that I worked a lot; I went mostly to explore (Faton, aged 40, Athens)

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[...] the first time I went to Belgium, I went alone with my ex-boss. I took the decision with my wife; they (wife and two children) had to stay put in Italy at the beginning. Then, after a couple of months, I turned back to Italy to bring the whole family and to relocate. (Isuf, aged 39, Milan)

Migrants' mental maps are built upon migrants and their families' future needs; conditioned by insecurity and uncertainty for the future. Abolition of restrictions on visa issuing for Albanian

tourists within the Schengen area has given the opportunity to all of them to travel and stay in Europe in a continuous way up to three months. Travelling to other European countries and working – informally or not – in local labour market permit Albanians to evaluate the feasibility of a new migration episode.

This process concerns usually males' mobility. As introduced in Chapter 1, Albanian migration was built upon the gendered division of labour. Since the Ottoman Empire era, the male members of the family were those who went to live and work away from their homes to maintain an income of subsistence in times of harshness (King *et al.*, 2006). Even today, males' sacrifices for the good of the family and the gendered labour mobility reflect the practice of *kurbet*. Getting the family from the very first travel is considered as an irresponsible practice, and male migrants may bring their family members at a later stage; as it occurred years ago, when they decided to migrate to Italy or Greece.

The choice on the new destination depends highly on migrants' social networks. My respondents sought job opportunities in a new country mainly through their family networks. However, professional networks also have been of prime importance in the sense that ex-colleagues might be also an information source for those seeking job opportunities in a third country. This is the case of some respondents who carry out transnational practices through acquaintances with Italian and Greek people. For the majority of Albanians in Greece, ties with Albanian construction workers might pull them not only to northern European countries, but also to Southern European countries, especially in Italy where resides the second biggest Albanian migrant community. From the other hand, it would be considered rather rare that Albanians from Italy move to Greece in search of a better future.

I've heard that the situation has changed in Italy. The market conditions have been very favourable for the last year and a half. [...] My brothers work 6-7 days per month. They're self-employed workers. I won't have the right to work, but I can stay there for three months. [...] I talk many times with them and my cousins on Skype. We're talking about the work here (Greece) and there (Italy). They always say to me "come! Just come to see!" (Armend, aged 43, Athens)

As analysed in Chapter 3, Albanian construction workers rarely rely on formal channels when seeking job. The same occurs for those who seek to move towards a third country, since they usually resort to social ties. However, one of my respondents has found a job opportunity in Germany through a newspaper advertisement. He would like to go to work in a Greek restaurant in Germany with his wife, but commitments related to his son forced them to cancel their migratory plan. In this respect, other family members and parents' support might be an

indispensable source of assistance to couples that may opt to explore job opportunities in a third country (see for instance in Colombo, 1999). In this case too, prior skills may be utilized to change career and work in the European labour market.

Four years ago, I had the opportunity to go to Germany. I saw an advertisement and they asked couples to go to work to Greek restaurants in Germany. He (employer) sought also for a grill man. I had worked both as a waiter and as a grill man in the past. My wife had also worked in a restaurant. However, the child was a problem, because I was to asked to work for 12 hours per day. It was impossible for us. Who would have taken care of our son? I asked my mother-in-law, I asked my sister.... It was impossible to convince them. They didn't want to assume any responsibility, since he is an only child. (Pellumb, aged 48, Athens).

As indicated in the quote above, young family members' needs might constrain workers' agency, especially during the first period of the new migration episode. A further constraint also should be considered the language, since the constant migrants' concern seems to be their incompetence to communicate, or the difficulty to learn a new foreign language.

My brother left Italy and he is currently working in Germany. He has moved with his wife and they're making a new start... little by little. [...]The beginning is always difficult, as it was for us, when we first arrived in Italy. It is difficult because of the language, but he's currently working with Albanian entrepreneurs; I'd say that language is not so necessary for the moment. (Mantor, aged 34, Milan)

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I'm thinking about going to Germany if the situation remains like this. I've started to learn German using a website. It's not easy at all, but the language doesn't scare me. (Fatlum, aged 35, Athens)

Language seems to constitute a barrier only in cases in which migrants have permanent settlement aspirations. At a first stage, this difficulty may be addressed by working for co-nationals (Portes, 1995). However, as put concisely by Fatlum, migrants may overcome this barriers when they have a concrete plan in mind; when they draw up their geography needs in advance, and put effort in learning the language of the new country of destination while they are still in Greece or Italy.

What though appears to remain a not easily surmountable constraint is the irregularity of migratory status, that is the lack of long-term EU residence permit that allows holders working in any EU country. In contrast with the first years of Albanian migration, which was characterized by irregularity of migratory status, now irregularity concerns the right to work. In other words,

even if Albanian immigrants may not have a regular work permit, they may enter European countries that joined the EU's free travel Schengen Area. Once they enter the new country, they have the time to reflect on the possibility to move in that specific country by exploring the local labour market without having the fear of being deported.

I hadn't worked at all for one year, and I was thinking of going abroad. That's precisely the time when I could get a job in Sweden, but my documents weren't okay. It was a serious company. The salary was 1800 euro, and they're giving you the place to sleep. But, I hadn't the five-year stay permit. Now, I have it, but no offer arrives! [...] it was socking for them "hey guys! How is it possible you didn't get the citizenship after 10 years of work there?"(Gjin, aged 34, Athens).

Isuf's lived experience is a typical case of migrant builder who remained unemployed during the economic recession and decided to move to another European country to work. Isuf has been jobless several times from 2007 onwards. He did not also received several monthly wages from ex-employers whose firms went bankrupt. In 2012, he decided to go to Belgium following an Italian contractor with whom he had worked in the past. The decision was taken jointly by him and his wife. Until he explores the new job opportunity in Belgium, he was assisted by his aunt who hosted him for 20 days. When he realized that working in Belgium could be a great opportunity to supplement family's income and make a new start after three years of underemployment, he brought his family to Belgium and they stayed there for one year. Isuf relates:

I: The first time I went there I went by plain. [...] I slept for 20 days at an aunt's house. After that, I had to come back to get my family and all the necessary stuff. I drove with my Italian boss's minivan and I took what I needed. At that time, I didn't have the right documents to work, but my boss made me register with the Italian VAT number, and in this way, I renewed my documents for two years. If you have documents, it's wonderful. Because those who have the documents, gain more in Belgium. I was paid 80 euro per day, instead of 120. [...] One year later, we had to decide. My daughter started to grow up, she had to speak or Italian or Belgian. My wife's documents also were to expire. We thought: "or we destroy what we've done until now in Italy and stay here, or ..." it was very difficult. We hadn't the documents. And we decided to come back to Italy, and make a new start again.

ID: But if you had the necessary documents in Belgium....

I: If I had the right documents, I wouldn't turn back to Italy not even for holidays! (Isuf, Milan, aged 39)

Isuf and his family expressed a clear preference for permanent resettlement in Belgium. Contrary to the majority of Moldovan and Ukrainian builders' initial purpose of their labour mobility to Russia and Italy, seen as a 'work trip' or as a way "to raise cash for a specific purpose" (Morrison and Sacchetto, 2014, p.35-36), Albanian workers create their mental maps based on their need to find a new destination country. Household economies have always a central role in deciding migration destinations and duration of migration episodes (Stark, 1991). From Isuf's case, it is obvious how constraining could be the possibility to regularize their stay in the new destination country. Having experienced hurdles to find formal job contracts and regularize their migratory status in Italy and Greece (Kosic and Triandafyllidou, 2003; Gemi, 2014), Albanian migrants may seem quite sceptical to jeopardize the possibility to renew their stay permits in the first country of destination. Those without a long-term EU stay permit find themselves in a quandary when deciding whether to re-emigrate towards another European country, since they may lack at once access to regular employment and welfare benefits already acquired in Italy and Greece. The decision to leave becomes even harder to make for those with families and children of school age (Gemi, 2014).

Within these institutional systems of constraints for migrants' mobility, a further barrier for construction workers' mobility to northern EU countries could be the lack of a trade certification. As introduced in Chapter 3, construction builders in Italy and Greece rarely follow a trade formation, and trade certificates are irrelevant for working in construction. However, there have been cases of migrants whose mobility or permanent settlement was hindered by the lack of prove of working experience and skills.

Nowadays, many immigrants are leaving to Sweden, and they (prospective employers) are asking the trade union how many years the concerned person has been registered with us... because there is no certification that he is a builder, they do not accept the welfare stamps as a proof of experience. If they are a member of the Trade Union for 20 years, they assume that he has 20 years of experience as builder. (Trade Unionist, 19/10/2016, Athens).

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I have acquaintances in Germany, but they asked me to have 5 or 10 years stay-permit. They also require that you issue a professional card and that you have a certificate, that you have done some seminars. (Milot, aged 41, Athens)

So far, I have analysed Albanians transnational movements between the country of destination and a new destination country. These forms of mobility were not transformed into stable settlement because of the lack of work permits and need to care for minor family members.

However, these transnational practices may involve a third transnational space that is the country of origin. It is the case of returned-migrants who developed transnational practices once they settled in Albania. These practices did not take place only between country of origin and country of first migration in a repetitive way (circular migration see for instance Triandafyllidou, 2013), but rather they concern a transnational space that varies according to migrants' needs.

Transnationalism practices to explore new migratory resettlement destinations: in-between home country, country of destination and new destination country

Return to the home country has been generally considered either as a utility maximizing decision, or as a failure of initial migration plans (Borjas and Bratsberg, 1996). In migration literature, commonest typologies on decisions to return assume that returnees might intend to migrate temporarily and returned after they had achieved their initial aims; initially intended to return, but for certain reasons they settled abroad; intended to stay permanently abroad, but for positive or negative reasons decided to return to their own country (Gmelch, 1980).

With regard to actual migration duration, Cerase's (1974) typology distinguishes further categories of those who return. Migrants may return due to failure (up to 5 years abroad) and due to problems of integration, poverty, unemployment; out of conservatism (5-15 years abroad), and after having satisfied their initial ambitions; for innovation (15-30 years), after a successful migratory experience in order to apply new ideas, to invest or generally to contribute to the development and social/political change of their country; for retirement.

Looking at first Albanian returnees, Labrianidis and Lyberaki (2004) argued that Albanian migrants returned to their home country after a successful migratory experience that translated into better employment status, housing and living conditions. They also highlighted the non-permanent character of return migration, that is return to Albania did not mean the end of migratory experience, rather an interval. Returnees might continue to go back and forth from Albania to Italy or Greece, favoured by geographical proximity. Albanian returning migrants from Greece were also more likely to utilize more efficiently the cultural capital accumulated in Greece in comparison to those from Italy whom adjustment and to the host society and labour market was more problematic.

Alluding at economic crisis impacts on migrant populations in the EU, many research surveys have highlighted how deterioration of host countries' economies has triggered return migration to countries of origin (Pusti, 2013; Zaiceva and Zimmermann, 2016), and, at the same time, halted

migrant labour mobility to traditional receiving countries (Awad, 2009; Papademetriou *et al.*, 2010). These contributions suggest that return migration has not occurred massively, since economic downturn has also affected the countries of origin.

Albanian migrants from both Italy and Greece have opted to return back as a practice to get by during economic recession Gedeshi and De Zwager (2012). This trend has been more relevant for Albanian male construction workers residing in Greece, due to the high unemployment rates in the last years (Gemi, 2013). Indeed, according to statistics, Albanian returnees from Greece represent the 70.8 per cent of total return migrants, whereas those from Italy represent the 23.7 per cent (Gemi, 2015). In addition, the decision to return to Albania has usually been connected with the difficulty in renewing the residence permits, largely for those residing in Greece (Maroukis and Gemi, 2010; Gemi, 2013).

Return decision does not mean the end of migration experience, but it may be connected to a “status of limbo” (“wait-and-see” situation)³⁷ until the economic conditions in the destination countries improve (Gemi, 2013). Albanian returned migrants’ “wait-and-see” practice has been usually connected with the political and economic situation in Albania that is considered less stable than that in Greece or Italy (Gemi, 2016). For many of them, Albania cannot offer the working opportunities they would expect, and they usually have to start up individual business to generate incomes for their household (Michail, 2013; Gemi, 2016).

The wish to return to Italy and Greece is also contingent upon their children’s future (Gemi, 2016). These individuals think that once their children become adults, they will have better opportunities in Italy and Greece. The alienation also that their children feel towards Albania may constitute a reason to re-emigrate once again from Albania (Vathi, 2015, p. 134). In addition, for Albanian families who have to reside in the grandparents’ house in Albania, the return plan may be seen as a failure, and implicates psychological distress (Michail, 2013). Hence, this category of returned migrants might have continued to travel back and forth from Albania to Greece or Italy, and usually have acquired the long-term stay permit (Maroukis and Gemi, 2011).

Focusing now on contemporary circular migration practices of Albanians, Vathi (2015) has argued that frequent return visits to Albania has been a way to evaluate opportunities in both labour markets of country of origin and destination (Italy, Greece, UK). Furthermore, Maroukis and Gemi (2011) have shown that returning migration is not only triggered by economic factors, but also by political instability in Greece. In this case, returnees might circulate between Albania

³⁷ However, some returned migrants seem to have completed their migratory project, and they consider their return as a successful step (Gemi, 2015).

and Greece exploiting occasional employment opportunities that lie ahead, until the situation improves to venture a permanent settlement. Similarly, few job opportunities in the Italian labour market have caused patterns of circular economic migration of Moroccans between Morocco to Italy (Devitt, 2013), and in a less extent transnational movement of Albanians between Italy and Albania (Mai and Paladini, 2013).

With reference to transnational mobility of Albanians during the economic crisis, Gemi (2014; 2016) sheds light on negotiations of returned-migrants between stay put and develop transnational practices. In particular, Gemi's analysis reveals some of the transnational practices of returnees to Albania, pointing out the significant role of families in decision-making process. She argues that transnational mobility had the characteristics of reactive transnationalism (Itzigsohn and Giorguli Saucedo, 2005); it can be seen as a strategy to avoid downward mobility (Fauser *et al.*, 2012); a shield against discrimination in the host society (Portes, 1999).

In this sense, return of Albanians in their home country did not mean permanent instalment, but rather a transitory stage in which transnational mobility among family members constituted a household strategy (Gemi, 2014). Geographical proximity between the home and host countries have favoured such mobilities, and some family members may stay put in Greece and other move to Albania to work or to make investments. In Italy, these movements are less frequent due to the more job opportunities immigrants have with respect to those in Greece. Hence, families have been split not only to minimize expenditures, but also to sustain a quality of living standards for their children such as following university courses (Gemi, 2016). In other cases, some family members may see this practice as an opportunity to invest in the country of origin. Split of families as a practice during economic recession has been also revealed by Sacchetto and Vianello (2016) with respect to Moroccan migrants. Sending economic inactive members back to Morocco was a strategy followed by Moroccan males who aimed to reduce expenditures in this way.

However, with regard to transnational practices of returning families or family members to Albania, negotiations and limbo may be interpreted as a part of an alternative plan of re-migrating to another country. In this case, Albanian returnees' transnational mobilities should not be seen as circular movements, but rather as temporary migration episodes. The findings of my fieldwork shed light on temporary migration patterns after return migration, and differ from traditional circular transnational movements of Albanians (Mai and Paladini, 2013; Maroukis and Gemi, 2013). To explore these temporary migration patterns is necessary to define the concept of temporary and circular migration.

Research on Albanians' circular mobility between Albania and Greece, and Albania and Italy - with a special focus on returned-migrants - explores transnational economic activities, and puts

emphasis on the repetitive nature of such an activity. In particular, Maroukis and Gemi (2013) and Mai and Palladini (2013) have studied circularity as “*international, temporary, repeated migration for economic reasons*” (Triandafyllidou, 2013, p. 13). Adopting this working definition for the collective work on *Circular Migration between Europe and its neighbourhood*, the authors specify four dimensions that characterize circular mobility: a) the legal or irregular nature of the movement; b) the level of skills and education of the people involved; c) the time length of each stay and return; and d) where the migrant is based. At the same time, they identify several factors (Sandu, 2005; Vertovec, 2007) that influence migrants’ circular movement such as: a) the age, in the sense that younger people have more propensity to be involved in such mobilities; b) the context, that is migrants from large rural areas tend to circulate more; c) migrants’ experience to move, rather than legality of their status.

Keeping in mind the dimensions that characterize circular mobility and the factors that influence it, I use the concept of temporary migration to analyse migrants’ tactics to explore new job opportunities in the country of destination, or in a third country. Temporary migration is distinct from circular movement, in that “*circular migration denotes a migrant’s continuous engagement in both home and adopted countries; it usually involves both return and repetition*” (Newland *et al.*, 2008, p. 2).

Two of my respondents, who have returned to Albania because of economic crisis, have been engaged in transnational mobility that did not have the characteristics of repetitive circular migration, but rather it was characterized by causality and discontinuity. Alban is 34 years old and lives with his wife and two children in Larissa (Greece). He arrived in Larissa in 1995, worked in agriculture, and went to Athens in 2000. Until 2011, he worked in Athens as dependent worker in carpentry, but, after almost one year of unemployment, he returned to Albania with his family on February 2012. In Albania, he worked for almost four months in construction, and he decided once again to move to Greece to work for a couple of months as a seasonal worker in agriculture in Kalamata (Greece). He found that job through two cousins of him. Leaving Kalamata and while returning to Albania, he stopped at Larissa the first city he had lived, and he had offered a new job through the acquaintances of an aunt of him. From 2014, he resides in Larissa permanently with his family where he works as a dependent worker. He acquired easily the long-term EU stay permit, since her wife had the Greek citizenship as an ethnic Greek.

While I was in Albania I made various jobs... whatever there was... building sites, agriculture... [...] There was my brother-in-law in Italy and he helped me to go and look for a job. Indeed, I found a job and he gave me also accommodation for the period I stayed there. I stayed in Italy for one month and half, and I worked 20 days. I wanted to

try... After the summer, I returned back in Albania with my brother-in-law due to the failure of his individual firm. He hadn't paid some taxes, so he opted to return home. [...] Sometimes, I think about it (sarcastic laughs)... how the hell I did it this stuff in two-two years and a half... to be around Albania, Greece, Italy, Albania, Greece. (Alban, aged 34, Greece)

Another respondent had been working as an off-the-books own-account worker for eight years in Athens. In 2012, he remained for a long period unemployed, and he decided to go to Albania with his family to work in the construction sector in his hometown. He worked there for two years, but he could not continue working anymore, because of the crisis in Albanian construction (Gemi, 2016). He opted to go to work in Italy in order to explore whether it was possible to emigrate once again with his family. He left his family back to Albania and he realized to work for a month through their family network. Not having the right to work in Italy, Azem returned to Albania where he stayed for other three months. Now, he has been residing in Greece for the last ten months, while his wife with their two children live in Albania. He possesses a two-year stay permit.

After these two years, I decided to go to Italy to work with my brother-in-law. I stayed there for almost 3 months, but I worked let's say just a month, in black, without being insured. It wasn't possible to declare you without documents. Because, another cousin of mine in Savona he couldn't employ me without documents. It doesn't work out like in Greece. (Azem, aged 46, Athens)

From the excerpts above, it can be confirmed that economic crisis has caused an increase of transnational practices (Gemi, 2014; 2016). Transnational labour mobility may be seen a tactic as it serves as temporary income-generating activity. Information for job opportunities usually circulate through family migrant (family) networks that Albanians keep them active to be able to go back and forth from Albania and their country of destination. In this respect, Gemi (2016) argued that Albanian migrants form a population that lives in two countries, and return can be seen as a survival strategy (Gedeshi and De Zwager, 2012), since living costs in Albania are significantly lower.

However, what my respondents' quotes above reveal is that new transnational spaces are not limited between host and home country. Geographical maps are created upon the possibility to resettle in a new destination; or to re-evaluate the possibilities to resettle in the home or host country. It comes, therefore, that Albanian migrants may form a population that lives in two (Gemi, 2016, p. 250) or more countries. Transnational movements have not anymore the bilocal

character of circular migration between countries of origin and return (Skeldon, 2009), but rather they are geographically fluid.

Indeed, after Alban and Azem's initial plan to work in the Albanian construction sector failed, they opted to go to Italy to work through their family network. In both cases, they have been invited by their brothers-in-law, and they went to Italy to explore the job opportunities. Both of them worked undeclared for a couple of months in the Italian construction industry. Although their initial intention to move to Italy in a more permanent way, they returned to Albania for different reasons. Alban's family network could not give him anymore the possibility to work, since the low economic activity in the Italian construction as well, while Azem could not stay longer and be employed as regular worker due to the fact he lacked the long-term EU permit. In the last three-four years, both of them have lived in between Albania, Greece and Italy. Now, both of them live in Greece; Alban with his family; Azem without it.

Turning to De Certeau's (1984) concepts of *strategy* and *tactic*, it can be said that such transnational movements have largely a *tactical* nature. In most cases, social actors have moved from one place to another, in a rather non-continuous way. They have followed others' actions, in the sense that when they have been called by their social networks, they decided to go abroad to explore new opportunities and increment their income; it happened in a rather casual way. They have not been autonomous when taking decisions, and their permanence or not in a third country has been largely depended on the others; these practices usually last little time. In addition, Albanian migrants have navigated new labour markets without being informed about the rules and the laws in new countries, and, for this reason, they have to adapt continuously their plans and find solutions to overcome structural constraints. Their home country seems to be the place where they may ensure their family survival, but it constitutes a temporal solution.

As argued in the previous section too, plans for resettlement in an EU country may be mainly constrained by irregularity of migratory status. When migrants realize that they cannot continue taking forward ambitious resettlement plans, these temporary movements may take a '*predatory*' dimension (Perrotta, 2011), that is transformed into work trips in European construction's informal economy.

Dynamic transformation of transnationalism practices: from exploratory labour mobility to temporary work trips

In his study on Romanian migrants in the Italian construction sector, Perrotta (2011) uses the term ‘*predatory*’ disposition’ to explore Romanian construction workers temporary transnational movements to other EU countries. The ‘*predatory*’ disposition does not refer to illegality, but rather to the possibility of labour mobility directed to gain money and send it back home. This disposition was developed by many irregular Romanians who saw Italy as a territory of exploitation of their work by unscrupulous employers. In other words, ‘*predatory*’ disposition was reinforced by the perception that Italian employers exploited them by not respecting contractual terms and due to tax avoidance practices, so that for many of them the Italian experience consists in being stolen and steal (Sacchetto, 2004). According to Perrotta and Sacchetto this disposition is transformed in “auto-predatory”, when migrants tend to exploit their body and the organization of work to gain and save the biggest amount of money in short periods.

For my respondents, the lack of long-term EU residence (and work permit), and the great difficulty of having a work permit in the new country transform migrants’ aspirations of permanent resettlement into short-term tactics to gain cash earnings. In this case, mobility to other EU countries constitutes a practice of an individual migrant worker in order to generate income during periods when Albanian migrants remained unemployed. It does not have all the characteristics of ‘*predatory*’ trips, since migrants are not characterised by lack of stay permit, but of work permit. Adnan relates:

I know some Greek guys working in Austria, Greek friends. You are required to have a five-year stay permit to work there. I wanted to convert it from 3 to 5 years, but now I cannot because I don’t have the welfare stamps. I applied for, it but I was waiting, but the card didn’t arrive. So, without the documents and since I did not intend to settle in Austria, I worked in black. I was working with a fake identity, a photocopy. [...] you make an agreement with the employer, and if it comes to take 25 euro, you take 12,5 per hour, and 12,5 go to him. It’s ok, I’m satisfied with the money. When there’s the opportunity I go there. [...] now another colleague of mine is going to go in Austria to work for at least 10 days, when the building site (in Athens) is closed for summer holidays (Adnan, aged 40, Athens)

In this telling example, it is clear that labour mobility may be materially significant to workers. Temporary labour mobility may acquire the characteristics of circular movements, only when there is a repetitive characteristic between the main country of residence and the destination

country. Contrary to many Romanians' practices (Perrotta, 2011), it can be considered quite unusual that Albanians use this money to sustain "house-making-projects" in their home country. Albanians use this money to cover current needs, as "house making projects" seem to be suspended (Michail, 2013).

With regards to Albanian migrants' 'predatory' disposition, it may be argued that both the Italian and Greek context have contributed to the creation of such a work culture. Having worked at the beginning of their migration experience without a stay permit, and continuing to work without formal contracts (in the Greek case) and to be engaged in various forms of informal arrangements (in both countries, see Chapter 4), Albanian builders might have developed a "predatory" disposition that enables them to move in third countries in order to work undeclared.

As concerns the factors that condition Albanians' transnational movements, it can be said that the absence of the five-year EU stay permit remains a key factor. Contrary to Romanians' ambitions to become regular migrants through regularization programs (Perrotta, 2011)³⁸, nowadays Albanians are convinced that the only factor that could allow a permanent resettlement in another European country might be the acquisition of long-term stay permits or European citizenship. Hence, it could not be assumed that Albanians create their transnational maps based on which country may give more opportunities of regularization, but on the basis of their networks.

Adnan's example confirms also how well-integrated migrants in host societies may take benefit of their weak ties to resist during the economic recession period. Indeed, in Chapter 3, I explored how weak social ties and the development of cultural capital may generate job opportunities in the local labour markets. What is of interest with regard to international mobility is how Albanian migrants may find job opportunities abroad through acquaintances with natives. Adnan and his colleague's work trips were just an example of how Albanian migrants may find job opportunities in construction of other EU countries in which many of their acquaintances have moved due to the crisis for highly skilled trade in construction.

Turning to the proposed typology in the conclusions section, it can be said that Adnan represents an expectant migrant. He is 40 years old married with two children, and he lives in Athens. He has a three-year stay permit, and, during the last years, he has considered to return back to Albania several times. He socializes with both Albanians and Greeks, and he usually makes work trips to Austria, where he finds occasional job opportunities through his former Greek colleagues. At the moment of the interview, he was dishearten by the fact that he could not acquire the long-term EU permit that would allow him to move permanently to another EU country; he said to me, that

³⁸ The author carried out the research before Romania joined the EU.

he does not believe that he will have the possibility to re-emigrate to an EU country, even if he does not exclude the possibility of doing so in the future.

Comparing, now, Albanians' intra-EU mobility to that of migrant workers from new EU member countries (Perrotta, 2014; Andrijasevic and Sacchetto, 2017) it can be said that Albanians' mobility towards other EU countries is constrained by their immigrant status, whereas Romanians and Bulgarians have the possibility to move and work across the EU as EU citizens, after their countries joined the EU in 2007. This right has enabled Romanians and Bulgarians not only to find work through their informal networks, but rather to use temporary work agencies to find employment opportunities all over Europe. Being in touch with labour agencies, migrant workers have also the possibility to find shelter, even of poor conditions. Perrotta (2014) states that Romanians have the possibility to select various destinations and a wide range of job opportunities all over Europe through their informal networks, since Romanian migrants reside in a series of European countries. Borders are not relevant anymore, even if free movement does not always result in better salaries and conditions with respect to other already settled migrant non-EU populations. In this way, migrant workers have the possibility to search for employment in different sectors, moving from one country to another, without even developing particular ties in the country of destination. On the other hand, Albanians have limited options to move, not only because of their immigrant status, but due to the fact that Albanian emigrants have traditionally concentrated in Italy and Greece, where job opportunities have been few during the last years. With regard to Germany where there are about 300,000 Albanians, it should be noted that the majority of them have moved from Kosovo (Chapter 1), and as a result, it might be assumed that mobility may regard ethnic community networks.

All in all, although transnational labour mobility usually has an exploratory, I show in the next section how Albanian builders can utilize their networks to work temporarily in a new country, taking benefit of the globalized character of construction production.

Work opportunities in the global construction industry

As analysed in Chapter 3, building trades' professional networks are of great importance (Thiel, 2010). This pattern also applies to labour mobility towards a third country. As two contractors of my sample relate, undertaking construction activities in other countries or continents entails the mobility of the majority of their employees. In this way, Italian or Greek construction companies, independently of owners' nationality, may opt to move part of their personnel abroad, and not to employ new construction workers in the country where there is construction activity.

I went to Oman in February (2016), you know where it is. I went there because you always look for an alternative in case the things go bad, don't you? Even there, when you say that I come from an Italian experience (emphasis), I am an Italian company, you are always well accepted.

ID: but how did you decide to go to Oman?

P: I had acquaintances there who invited me to go there to build. There are many opportunities there to go to construct, but what prevents us now is that, at this moment, we're working here. I'd have to invest so much there, but I'm sure that you can earn money there. (Pirro, aged 39, Milan)

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A: Now I'm contemplating going either to America or to Australia. We are already in discussions with two companies in Australia to make partnership. But I won't go alone! With my groups together! I'm trying to convince them (the workers), because I cannot go for business in Australia alone. I have to take at least 20 people with me... but I won't go just for one building site... I said them (potential partners) to guarantee me at least 2-3 big works, to work at least for a year. And then I'll see whether there is the possibility to stay there.

ID: but, how did they know you? How did you get in contact with them?

A: There was one Greek who lived in Australia for a long time, and he returned to live in Athens. We met, and he asked me the price of a house I was constructing at the time. I said close to 180 – 200 thousands euro. He replied me that such a home in Australia costs over \$ 1.5 million. I asked him to find me 2-3 works, to make an agreement... I asked them for the documents and he'll let me know. My workers want also to know whether they can get the families with them. It's not easy for us to be separated from our families. (Arlin, aged 45, Athens).

Based on the global reputation that Italian firms have in the construction market, Italian firms may move to other countries around the world and undertake works. In addition, it seems that Greek firms have a lower cost of production, that could be a sufficient reason for foreign companies to subcontract part of labour to Greek building groups in countries in which the cost of native workforce is quite higher (Lillie and Greer, 2007). In this case, Greek and Italian firms may move to other countries, bringing part of their work groups.

Once again, it is confirmed the centrality of networks in construction (Thiel, 2010) and the job opportunities that migrants may have in a globalized market (Massey and Taylor, 2004). In those cases, the importance of the employment groups in construction is obvious. Construction firm owners in both countries consider that undertaking and executing works in a third country could

be successful only if they might move with their work groups. In this sense, Grieko (1987) points out that existing workgroups may reproduce labour knowledge to newcomers. Indeed, Arlin and Pirro would “get” with them a number of their employees, so that they could be sure that they could impart skills to other colleagues in the country of destination. On the other hand, as explored in Chapter 3, working with their employees that already trust is indispensable to deal with informality that prevails in construction. Hence, Albanian migrants’ labour mobility may be connected with the possibility of their employers to move and carry out works outside Italy and Greece.

Compared to the risks that migrant construction workers may run when employed by labour agencies in the Gulf region (Buckley, 2014), Albanian migrants seem to be more protected working with their previous employers in Italy or Greece. In that case study, Buckley (2012) has highlighted the exploitation Indian construction workers have suffered working in Dubai’s construction market; how this working experience indebted them due to the fact that they had to pay recruitment agencies to find that job. From the other side, Albanian migrants may be guaranteed a minimum of standards, because they depart for such destinations with their employers they already trust, even if volatility in global construction may endanger their tactics.

Such a practice has obviously *tactical* elements. Albanian workers do not seem autonomous and may follow their employer in a rather casual way. The information about job opportunities abroad may arrive in a passive way, and it can be assumed that there is a lack of information about the situation in the new destination country. Hence, Albanian workers shall follow their employers, not being able to exercise any control on such practice.

5.4 Contemplating migration to another country following women’s profession

Until now, I have illustrated cases of Albanian males’ mobility who undertake action to sustain their families’ income and create the necessary conditions for a new migratory episode. However, it can be assumed that also Albanian women might have a central role in this procedure. Even if there have been limited evidences and narration of such a practice, it may be assumed that Albanian women may switch things around, and be themselves the pioneers of a new migratory experience.

Although migration from Albania has traditionally entailed males’ labour mobility (Papailias, 2003), it seems that highly skilled Albanian females may seek to utilize their educational qualifications acquired in Albania to work in other European countries. This might be the case of

Albanian females with a formation in health sector trades, since labour shortages in this sector are quite high in many Northern European countries (see for instance in Germany, OECD, 2013).

In this respect, two of my respondents indicated that there have been aware of labour shortages in Northern European countries. They referred to some fairs organized by German employment Agencies in Albania seeking for workforce. Having exhausted all alternative options, migrant males may opt to follow their wives' labour mobility. This mobility is mainly constrained by language skills of the new country of destination. Avni and Besian relate:

The Germans came to Albania to get the women to work as nurses, obstetrics... Everyone wanted to go immediately! But, it's not like this man! You have to learn the language first!
(Avni, aged 34, Athens)

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[...] and, then, another option left is to go to Germany. Since my wife has graduated in nursing... there, they need nurses .. She seeks the ads... but the problem remains that my wife doesn't speak the German language .. this is the problem .. if she spoke the German language... I don't know what level they require... A2 or B1... you can go directly from Albania, because there are agencies, there're projects.... they guarantee you job. But the problems remains the language .. so, if we go back to our country, she may have an intensive course and if we succeed with the German language we can make it... Because they will guarantee documents for the whole family (Besian, aged 44, Milan)

From the previous quotes, it seems that unemployed construction workers are contemplating to join their wives in case they succeed to be recruited in the European health sector. In this case, females might be active agents in the decision-making process, and the central actors in the new migratory episode. Even though empirical findings miss to confirm such an assumption, it may be said that women may become the pioneers of a new migratory episode, transforming predominant cultural values on gender, and being against the common view that females usually follow their husbands in the migratory destination (Phizacklea, 1999).

5.5 Conclusions

In this chapter, I imprinted Albanian migrants' responses to cope with unemployment in Milan and in Athens. Contrary to findings in Chapter 3 concentrating on social actors' agency to continue working in construction, here the emphasis is on jobless Albanians' practices to overcome stagnation in residential construction, and seek employment in other sectors. In doing

so, I depicted two types of actions based on a spatial dimension: tactics within the city (or country) boundaries, and those involving transnational mobility within two or more countries.

First, I showed how my research subjects have to save economic resources, and what the importance of weak social ties with native people is. Reciprocal trust is a key element to achieve to cut housing expenditures, together with exchange of rent discounts for labour. Migrants' cultural and social capital also are of great importance, when it comes to send children to public nursery schools that permits saving money.

Second, it has been confirmed that Albanian migrants' beliefs and suspiciousness towards institutional and collective actors may constrain the possibility to take benefit of economic and non-material assistance. In this sense, migrants seem to have used mainly state subsidies to sustain their income, and this tactic may become more efficient when they interact and have good relationships with native people. However, it may be assumed that some of my respondents have relied on collective actors to be provided with basic commodities, but they did not admit so as a matter of pride.

Third, it has been argued that occupational mobility has not been the result of vocational training and reintegration schemes, and formal channels of recruitment, but rather it usually comes through reactivation of old acquaintances, and utilization of skills acquired in the past. The same is true for those who opt to start up a business, as it seems that they may invest on their already acquired skills. Another option remains starting up firms in unskilled sectors as cleaning services, where Albanians may be in an advantageous position due to the fact that the majority of Albanian females are occupied in that sector. In other words, Albanian entrepreneurs in cleaning services may rely on fellow national workforce that would generate a reciprocal relation between employers and employees.

Fourth, an important income resource stems from female's occupation. It has been illustrated how women's employment may offer income to the household, as well as time to males to seek for new employment. In this case, it is crucial to note the change of the division of labour in Albanians houses, as males usually undertake the children care.

With regard to transnational practices, analysis of empirical material highlighted jobless migrants' continuous struggle to find a new destination to escape from the impasse in the host country. These practices may have a circulatory nature in the sense that migrants and their families may be simultaneously present in Albania and in the host country. However, it may have other forms with various time dimensions.

In particular, it has been confirmed how a return may constitute a transitory step of migrants' plans to move to another country (Gemi, 2016). The findings show how return to home country may be considered a "bridgehead" from which migrants may plan further mobilities, and where migrants may save more economic resources, since they have not to pay for shelter. The same tactic may be followed from the host country, Italy or Greece, in the sense that Albanians move to other European countries to explore job opportunities and the possibility that temporary "work trips" may create the foundations of a new migratory episode. In cases where institutional constraints limit such a possibility, the exploratory nature of work trips may converted into labour mobility, in the sense that Albanian migrants may continue to work informally in other European countries for short or longer periods of time, aiming solely at supplementing family income. However, it cannot be excluded the possibility that if they realize to hold a long-term EU stay permit in the future, they shall take benefit of the social contacts created, and decide to settle permanently to another EU country.

Reflecting on the existing debate on transnational practices and based on the findings of this research, I identify a new type of transnational activity that I call "transnational exploratory practices". First, this type includes an interest in practices of working-class people; it is "*transnationalism from below*" (Guarnizo and Smith, 1998), that is practices are "*grounded in the daily lives, activities and social relationships of quotidian actors*" (Glick Schiller *et al.* 1992, p. 5). This type of mobility concerns labour mobility, and it occurs mainly for economic reasons due to the few job opportunities in the country of residence, in that similar with Itzigsohn and Giorguli Saucedo's (2005) "*reactive transnationalism*". However, *transnational exploratory practices* are not usually connected with experiences of discrimination nor involve mobility as a way to reacquire social status. Moreover, although scholars have argued that transnational movements cannot be relevant for second generations (Morawska, 2003), within *transnational exploratory practices* the second generation have a great relevance, since these practices aim to investigate new places that could offer a more promising future for their children.

The type proposed consists in movements towards third countries in order to explore new economic opportunities. It comes therefore that transnational exploratory practices are realized in social spaces not always located between the country of origin and the country of destination but also within new destinations. As illustrated above, when the geographic distance between host and home country is short, the home country may be used as an intermediate point in order to save financial resources. It comes therefore that *transnational exploratory practices* are not limited in two contexts, but rather it may concern three or more contexts. In addition, when transnational patterns are conditioned by supra-national migration policies (Schengen area rules), *transnational exploratory practices* may take place in a transnational field which borders coincide

with national borders of the countries that make part of such regimes. Migrants looking for a new destination create new mental maps following their networks already installed in another country. These networks may provide various types of support: (irregular) employment, when social contacts are self-employed workers, information on job opportunities, and accommodation. These networks do not consist only of family members or conationals, but rather these networks may be professional, that is migrants' social ties with native colleagues in the first country of destination. This type of transnational mobility differs fundamentally from circular migration due to its not repeated character; it is rather of an occasional and spontaneous nature. All in all, *transnational exploratory practices* may be defined as those migrants' activities aiming at exploring a new country towards which a migrants plan to (re)emigrate. It presupposes the existence of social ties across national borders and concern labour mobility. It may become repeated (and as such circular) when migrants' aspiration for permanent settlement transform into short. Transnational exploratory practices involve labour migration in sectors in which migrants have already acquired skills, and that permit the prevalence of informal employment.

Turning to other practices analysed in this chapter, there have been cases of migrants who have the possibility to work in far destinations following their employer's entrepreneurial plans. Last but not least, Albanian males may follow women's mobility in the eventuality that females may utilize their skills to work in another European country.

All the above-mentioned coping practices may be constrained or favoured by several non-economic factors such as builders' work identity, masculine culture and centrality of body power. On the other hand, migrants' characteristics as age, family status and migratory status have not to be obscured when evaluating Albanian builders' sources of agency.

6. Conclusions

6.1 Purpose statement

The purpose of this dissertation was to understand how male Albanian migrant builders and their families continue to reside in Milan and Athens during the recession period given the lack of job opportunities in the construction sector. In order to answer this question, the two case studies have mainly concentrated on three different aspects. First, I analysed the factors that ensure continuity in building trades, that is how Albanian migrants continue to get a job in residential construction. Second, I put emphasis on migrants' engagement in informal employment to understand whether and when such engagement may constitute an active response to cope with high unemployment rates. Third, beyond their occupation in construction, I explored the practices that migrants and their households developed in order to get by during the crisis.

6.2 Summary of the main findings

6.2.1 Getting a job

In Chapter 3, I analysed the job recruitment process in the Milanese and Athenian residential construction sector, paying attention on both formal and informal channels to find out how migrants have been able to make a living from building trades. The analysis contributes to a better understanding of the importance of networked recruitment in both contexts, and the inconsequential role either of formal methods of job search (labour agencies, newspaper, internet), or other informal recruiting channels (street corner labour market, brokers) in residential construction. Chapter 3 reinforces existing theories on the importance that informal networks have for migrants when getting a job (Granovetter, 1974; especially in construction: Thiel, 2007; 2010; 2012a), offering insights on the types of social ties and the specific individual characteristics that permit migrants to carry on working in residential construction. In particular, I illustrate the strength of "weak social ties" in finding employment (Granovetter, 1973), and the factors that increased migrants' capacity to mobilise available resources, such as socialization with native colleagues and employers; acquiring of new skills (specialisation change) and knowledge on the use of new building materials; proficiency in local language; propensity for self-employment. Examining illicit hiring through informal intermediaries, the chapter offered a first typology of informal brokers that can serve as a point of departure for the study of brokers' action in construction. The typology is based on social actors' role in the labour market and it

identifies (1) the *artisan broker* when the actors is an independent worker; (2) the *mate broker*, when the intermediary is a dependent worker; (3) the *professional broker*, when the broker has worked in the past and now intermediates between the supply and demand side; (4) the *extraneous broker*, when the social actor who intermediates has no relation with building trades.

6.2.2 Working informally

Drawing on empirical material from all my informants' recounts (workers, trade unionists, labour inspectors), this dissertation highlights the need to differentiate among various types of informal employment when studying informal economy. Digging into various forms of informal working arrangements, not only I illustrated that migrants' involvement in informal economy occurs out of necessity, but I showed under which conditions some informal migrant workers achieve to benefit of informal arrangements more than others. In this respect, regularity of immigrant status, economic capital (savings and wife's employment), family status, the position of workers within the networks, and cultural capital (professional, organisational and language skills) are factors that determine migrants' bargaining power to negotiate terms and capacity to capitalize benefits from their involvement in informal employment. Moreover, apart from issues connected with migrants' networks and individual characteristics, this study confirmed that state policies may encourage workers' engagements in informal employment (Weiss, 1987; Fernandes-Kelly and Garcia, 1989; Leonard, 2000, Kapsalis, 2015). Indeed, declared employment has constituted a disincentive for many migrant workers, in that it implicates shrinking of their incomes. Findings also indicated that the study of informal employment requires taking into account different theoretical insights that see formal and informal sector as a continuum between the formal and informal realm of the economy.

6.2.3 Households coping with the crisis

Beyond issues connected with migrants' economic action within host country's residential construction, I explored Albanian builders' practices outside the construction sector, and their transnational practices. The study suggested that migrant households may cut their expenditures not only on secondary needs (luxuries, amusements, and entertainment), but also on necessity goods. It has been demonstrated that the efficiency to limit monthly expenses may lie on the relations with native people. Albanian migrant households may address collective and institutional actors to supplement their income or be provided essential goods, but this practice

seems to be conditioned by cultural values (sense of pride) and beliefs (suspicion) on the role of such actors. Occupational mobility is another response adopted by migrants during the crisis, usually connected with migrants who possess high levels of cultural capital (language or skills) and individuals under 45 years old. An interesting finding of the study concerns the changing role of household breadwinner and the mutation of household division of labour. In both contexts, it has been indicated that employed wives' salaries have maintained the household economy, whereas children care may not be exclusively considered anymore a female task.

I casted also light on migrant builders' transnational practices between host and home country, and between country of destination and another EU country. In this respect, I introduced the concept of migrants' *transnational exploratory practices*, that is spontaneous labour mobility towards a third EU country in order to evaluate the possibility to re-emigrate. In this case study, these practices are usually connected with labour mobility within EU construction, and are based on the existence of migrants' networks in the new destination country. It has been shown also that when aspiration for permanent settlements weakens, this kind of transnational practices may take the form of temporary "work trips" in the sense that migrants create transnational spaces in which they work informally to maximize their income. In the light of these findings, the figure 6.1 summarizes the main practices adopted by Albanian builders during the economic crisis

Figure 6.1 - Tactics employed in Italy and Greece

Context/Sector	Construction trades	Outside the construction
Staying the host country	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Acquiring new skills b. Informal working arrangements c. Wife's employment d. Solidarity (economic and emotional) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Wife's employment b. Occupational mobility c. Self-employment d. Cost saving e. Collective/Institutional actors' assistance f. Solidarity (economic and emotional)
Beyond host country's borders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Migration to another country b. Return migration c. Global labour mobility d. Informal work within EU construction e. Solidarity (economic and emotional) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Return migration (investments, self-employment) b. Transnational practices c. Solidarity (economic and emotional)

6.3 Contribution to knowledge

6.3.1 Type of migrants

Throughout the empirical material analysis, I proposed a research approach that takes as a starting point the various level of migrants' power. Whereas the literature on regular migrants has often distinguished between powerless (no agency) and powerful actors (agency), that is overemphasizing structure or agency, I identified a third space: practices that may be positioned in-between these two extremities. My analysis proposed therefore three types of migrant profiles that correspond to their individual characteristics and their capacity to undertake (or not) passive or more active responses. Figure 6.2 summarizes the features of each type with respect to the questions examined in this dissertation.

Entrapped are those migrants who have mainly relied to bonding and horizontal social ties to find employment during the crisis. Their networks have not been able to circulate information on job opportunities, and these migrants have remained unemployed for long periods. They are generally over 45 years old and have already created their family. They do not seem keen to reskill in construction or follow formation courses to change profession, because they have usually remained attached to their work identity; are not flexible to move to other trades. They usually have low linguistic competences and limited knowledge of the rules. Their economic capital is also low and *entrapped* migrants may risk to lapse into irregularity, since they do not have often acquired long-term stay permit. They are usually engaged in informal economic activities out of necessity, or as a tactic to increment temporarily their revenues. Their household income largely derives from wife's employment, solidarity between family or community members and collective actors' or institutional assistance. They rarely opt to travel within EU countries to work temporarily, and if they fail to get by in the country of destination, they may return to Albania.

The second type of migrant is the *expectant*. This migrant is under 45 years old and have usually created family. He has limited economic capital and utilized both bonding and bridging social ties, not always with success though. For this reason, *expectant* migrants are often dependent on woman's employment and occasional works to get by. They have good competences in language, and they might reskill during the recession period in order to increase their employability. They are usually engaged in informality out of necessity, or with a higher level of negotiation power, when they have acquired the long-term stay permit. They see mobility across Schengen space as cash-generating practices or as an opportunity to explore new labour markets where they may move when conditions permit (maybe actually constrained by legal status or due to limited economic capital).

Dynamic migrants are those individuals, usually under 45 years old, who have realized to break from ethnic to wider networks (weak bridging social ties) and have accumulated a moderate economic capital that permit them to start up an individual firm or invest in the home country. They have proficiency in local language and for this reason they have the possibility to work as own account workers. *Dynamic* migrants are able to negotiate better than other two migrant types when involved in informal employment, or to undertake and bid for works hiring informally a team of other workers. They have been occasionally assisted by wife's employment only during stagnation periods of economic activity, or, alternatively they have reskilled or changed profession during the crisis. They may plan to move to new destinations when they calculate that a new migration episode should be more beneficial for household economy. This new mobility is not constrained by legal status, since they have acquired the right to move and work in other EU countries.

Having built this typology, it is now interesting to explore the relations among these three types of migrants. Starting from the *entrapped* migrant and moving towards the other two types, it seems that all forms of capital tend to increment in quality or quantity. Hence, it can be assumed that there may be relations between the *entrapped* and *expectant* migrant, and between *expectant* and *dynamic migrant*; it seems quite unlikely that an *entrapped* migrant become *dynamic* in a short time and vice versa. The transition from a “weaker” type to a “stronger” depends largely on whether migrants achieve to widen their networks, improve their linguistic skills, acquire new professional skills, obtain the right to long-term stay permit, are keen to undertake some risk by working as own-account workers. However, once migrants made a transition (from a “weaker” to a “stronger” type and vice-versa), it does not mean that their condition is static, but rather they may turn back to the previous situation. It may occur due to personal errors and failures (for instance collaborating with untrustworthy persons or wrong assessment of a building activity); household members assistance (wife's or other member work); or external factors (for instance when employer's company failed, or once project financing stop). Thus, instead of considering these types as rigid and stable, I propose to consider them also as situations that characterize migrants' practices in a certain period of time.

Figure 6.2 Groups of migrant workers per forms of capital, coping practices, age, family and future plans

Migrant type	Economic capital	Social Capital	Cultural Capital	Coping Practices	Age/Family	Legal status	Future plans
<i>Entrapped</i>	Too limited	Bonding – (horizontal) strong ties	Low – Usually low linguistic skills and not diversified skills	Expenditure cut – Collective/institutional assistance – Occasional jobs – Informal employment out of necessity - Dependent on wife’s employment – Low transnational movement	Over 45 – with family	Short term and often dependent on woman’s employment	Stay-put or Return
<i>Expectant</i>	Limited	Bonding and Bridging – strong and weak ties	Good linguistic skills – Already acquired skills	Expenditure cut – Institutional assistance – Occupational Mobility – Relying on wife’s employment – Occasional jobs - Transnational exploratory practices: labour mobility/work trips, back and forth between Albania and host country, Global mobility	Under 45 – with family or without family	Short term or long term	Stay-put with a wait-and-see attitude. Possibility to re-emigrate again
<i>Dynamic</i>	Moderate (able to make investments)	Bridging – weak ties	Good or excellent linguistic skills – Diversified skills – Able to have a new formation	Expenditure cut – Occupational mobility or starting up new business – Occasionally assisted by wife’s employment - Transnational exploratory practices: labour mobility/work trips, investments in Albania, Global mobility	Under 45 – with or without family	Long-term	Self-employment. High possibility to re-emigrate again

6.3.2 Theoretical contribution to the agency debate

Although recognising migrants' capacity to mobilise resources in order to cope with unemployment, I found the notion of agency unsatisfactory in order to respond to the research questions. On the other hand, the exploration of various migrants' coping practices pushed me away from "no agency" positions, that is theoretical approaches that adopt a more determinist position with regard to (in)capacity of social actors to make decisions to improve their livelihoods. Thus, I find not helpful adopting monolithic views that accept or deny migrants' agency, and I propose the concept of *tacticism* that is found in-between the two extremities. In other words, migrants do not develop passive or active responses, but there is further nuance between victimism and "hyperactivity of agency" (Bakewell, 2010, p.1700).

To provide a more nuanced understanding of migrants' agency, I used De Certeau's concepts of strategy and tactic, and proposed a distinction between survival, tactical and strategic responses to analyse migrants' acts within very constrained economic environments. If survival act qualifies "no agency" and any forced option undertaken by passive social actors, and, if an "agent" is a powerful actor who can mobilise resources to achieve his own goals and shape structure, what is the relation between *tactical responses* and agency? What is the relation between tactic and strategy?

Building upon De Certeau's (1984) notion of tactic, I introduce the concept of "tacticism", borrowing from the Italian word "*tatticismo*". *Tatticismo* is defined as "*the frequent use of manoeuvres or tactical expedients*"³⁹ (Zanichelli, 1999, p. 667). Here, *tacticism* may be defined as the act of resorting to techniques, methods, procedures or modes in order achieve success in a situation in which rules are defined by other actors. *Tacticism* is a response to improve one's position and overcome obstacles imposed by powerful actors. Individuals who carry out tactical practices are not powerful, and are not able to make their own plans in a continuous way. To succeed their goal, they have to develop skills such as cunning and maneuvers, and to take benefit of structural gaps. *Tacticism* entails in negotiating conditions shaped by others, and as such, it presupposes a continuous adjustment of planning in order to possibly contest social order in the right moment. For this reason, the success or failure of any tactical practice does not involve acting in an autonomous way, and, thus, its progress may be temporal. Finally, tactics are not always based on a well-detailed plan for achieving success, but *tacticism* entails lack of information and asymmetry of knowledge between "strong" and "weak" actors.

³⁹ The author adds that *tatticismo* may have at times a derogatory meaning, in politics for instance. However, it is always connected to the word tactic that is defined as "the complex of actions and maneuvers intended to the attainment of a goal".

Turning now to the notion of agency, I argue that the notion of *tacticism* differs substantially from agency. Although agency “reflects the limited but real ability of human beings (or social groups) to make independent choices and to impose these on the world” (de Haas, 2014, p.21), *tacticism* does not reflect independent choices that are imposed on the others, but it depends on others’ plans, in the sense that it aims to take advantage of powerful actors’ omissions. Rather than controlling “the behaviours of others”, *tacticism* is carried out to avoid control by others. As such, *tactical* actions cannot “alter the structures that shape people’s opportunities or freedoms” (Ibid, p.21), nor “transform those social relations to some degree” (Sewell 1992, p. 20)”, but it may improve one’s situation only temporarily. Being an agent also means having adequate knowledge of the rules and the norms within a specific context; especially, in the case of migrants it concerns the good knowledge of local language. However, it seems that there is an asymmetry of information between “strong” actors (agents) and “weak” social subjects. With regards to the space in which social actors’ responses take place (De Certeau, 1984), it can be said that *tactical* acts occur in a space owned by “others”. Even if the dimension of space cannot fit adequately in my case studies, it might be assumed that *tactical* practices are positioned in spaces belong to others.

It may be argued that the relation between agency and *tacticism* may not always be antagonistic, but *tacticism* may be a progress towards agency; a step forward to gain power until a social actor can act as an agent. In other words, many “*tactical* victories” may enhance the capacity of actors to plan in a more autonomous way, and be able to win “battles” that bring to them long-term advantages. The result of a series of successful *tactics* may not give to weak social actors the possibility to alter structures permanently, but they may outweigh the losses of powerful agent. To be able to obtain the capacity to take initiatives in an independent way, actors should be equipped with various forms of resources such as social, cultural and economic capital. To better argue about the relation between *tacticism* and agency, I draw on three cases representing *tactical* practices to cope with crisis that were analysed in the previous chapters.

I have argued that Albanian migrants have usually used their bonding ties to find job opportunities in the labour market. When such informal networks were not able to circulate information on job opportunities, construction workers had to widen their acquaintances to remain economically active in that sector. Acquaintances have been enlarged by undertaking *tactics* that enhanced migrants’ cultural capital (language skills, reskill), that, in turn, was transformed into social capital. In this way, migrants have been able to increase their employability to find job, but, at the same time, to negotiate working terms from a better position. It comes, therefore, that *tactical* acts such as socializing with native people, or

reskilling enhance Albanian migrants' capacity to make independent choices and alter structures.

Drawing on one *tactical* practice related to informal employment, working as an off-the-books own-account worker may contribute to one's possibility to become an agent. In both contexts, there have been cases of migrant workers who bid for works without licenses. This permitted them to enhance their social and economic capital, that means improvement of their position. Taking advantage of widespread informal employment in both contexts, these social actors maintained or enhanced their networks and resources that may permit them to undertake independent actions in the long term.

With regard to Albanian migrants' transnational exploratory mobility, it may be assumed that this *tactic* may reinforce migrants' ability to overcome structural constraints in the future. For instance, supposing that one migrant worker continues to use his informal networks to find job in the informal economy of another European country, he may increment his economic capital that in turn may permit him to acquire a long-term EU stay permit (by starting-up an individual firm in Italy, or buying welfare stamps in Greece). Having such a legal status, he may be able to make a strategic action (agency) that is to move with his family to another EU country; to stay in the same country of destination, working as self-employed worker; or, by using accumulated economic capital, to invest in his home country.

Linking now survival practices, *tacticism* and agency with the typology of *entrapped*, *expectant* and *dynamic* migrant, it may be said that there is a correspondence of the three types of practices with types of migrants. In particular, it seems that *entrapped* migrants get by developing *survival* practices; *expectant* migrants develop tactical practices; *dynamic* migrants represent powerful agents. As already argued, I suggest that neither this correspondence is stiff, in the sense that *dynamic* migrants may be involved in *tactical* practices for which they are not able to control concretely the outcomes. On the other hand, *entrapped* migrants might develop *tactical* practices, when they are able to use competences such as cunning or maneuvers; or, when they are empowered by other actors' practices (for instance woman's employment). However, it is not likely that *dynamic* migrants develop *survival* practices neither *entrapped* migrants may do independent choices to achieve their goals.

6.3.3 Contribution to the theory on informal employment

Moving beyond simplistic theories that have considered formal and informal economy as distinct realms, I explored migrants' involvement in informal employment taking into consideration various theoretical positions. What though this thesis brings to the fore are the different nuances that characterize power relations when migrants are involved in informal economic activities. In doing so, I indicate that informal employment has not to be examined through views that consider actors passive or active; engagement in informal economy is out of choice or out of necessity. I suggest that migrants may have different levels of power when negotiating terms in informal employment that depend on their social, economic, cultural capital and legal status.

Turning to the notion of *tacticism* proposed before, I argue that *tactical* involvement in informal economic activities, that entails in engagements in informality following the outcomes of others' action and using skills like cunning to achieve temporary results, may result in gaining ground that, over time, may empower social actors. For instance, the acceptance of part-time job contracts - although working as full-timer - may be considered as a *tactical* response from someone who is in need of this type of contract to renew his stay permit. When this subject achieves to acquire a long-stay permit, and accumulates some economic capital, working off-the-books might be a *strategic* option to maximize his revenues; or, he may be paid more for overtime work.

6.3.4 Interplay between country policies and migrants' responses

Another interesting issue emerged from this study is the interplay between country policies and migrants' coping practices, that is how labour migration governance in Italy and Greece have shaped Albanian builders and their household's responses during the crisis. In both contexts, there have been Albanian migrants who lost their regular status, as a result of unemployment. The rigid link between job contract and residence permit have weakened migrants' power to negotiate working conditions, and they had to develop a series of responses to continue residing in the host country. For those with families, one response has been household division of labour that implicated a change in roles within households. In this way, they contributed to the family economy by taking care of the children, whereas woman's employment permitted the renewal of stay permits for all family members. In addition, unemployed migrants in Italy have been provided more time to search for a job, retaining their legal status for one year instead of 6 months (Consolidated Law of 2012). This provision has offered time for migrants to seek for

new employment and plan further steps. In Greece, stay permit renewal has been enabled with 50 working days, instead of 120 (Immigration Law in 2014), and exceptionally awarded for humanitarian reasons to vulnerable individuals (Triandafyllidou, 2015). In this case, Albanians have had the opportunity to ensure temporarily their legal status, and need to prove less formal working days in the construction sector to renew their stay permits; and, thus, they may opt to work informally to increment their income.

As regards national policies of giving long-term EU permit, it has been argued that in the Greek case it is hard to obtain it (Gemi, 2016), whereas Italy seems that have provided this type of stay permit to the majority of Albanian immigrant population (Danaj and Caro, 2016). Hence, Albanian migrants in Milan have been more likely to move to another EU labour market, after having explored new destinations through *transnational exploratory practices*, whereas this practice has reduced into work trips to maximize the revenues; moving to another EU country has been constantly constrained by legal status.

Moreover, it seems that both countries exceptional legal provisions have interplayed with migrants' *survival* or *tactical* responses. In Italy, special provisions for accommodation have offered the possibility to unemployed migrant workers to enjoy cheaper rentals, whereas in Greece special provisions for health care, food stamps, energy and rent subsidies have been supported household economies and might enhance migrants' capacity to avoid exploitative working terms.

On the other hand, unclear pension policies for immigrants and lack of bilateral agreements between Albania and Italy or Greece may trigger informal employment. There have been several examples of workers whose involvement in informality have been often conditioned by the lack of perspective of being entitled to pension benefits in the receiving country.

6.3.5 Structural characteristics and practices

Albanian migrants' practices have undoubtedly be conditioned by the characteristics of local labour markets. Extended subcontracting in Italy may create loopholes between labour and demand side that informal brokers exploit and make money out of workers' wages. On the other hand, peculiarities in Greek legislation permit migrant builders with propensity for self-employment to increase their income without being registered with authorities nor paying taxes. Another dimension that is connected with migrants' ability to have an extra income in construction is connected with the demand side, that is clients' demand for informal services

(ILO, 2016). In this respect, it may be assumed that since citizens of Athens have been found in a more difficult economic situation due to the crisis, they would seek to avoid to issue a building permit for any repair work for instance, requisite for the existence of formal employment. Migrants thus could find more opportunities to work as off-the-books own account workers, but, at the same time, those in need of proofs of employment would be found in a difficult position, since asking the client to issue a building permit for the works, could mean a failure in their collaboration.

The organization of the work in residential construction is also of relevance here. In the Greek construction sector, work starts at 7 am and usually finishes at 2.30-3 pm, without any pause for lunch. As Albanians in Greece related, it allowed them to have a second part-time job in the past during the afternoons. Thus, it might be assumed that builders in Greece had the opportunity to develop skills in a different sector than construction (catering for instance) that used in the current times to increase employability; or, they may undertake occasional works in the mornings, while working in another job in the afternoon.

Another difference between the two cities under study has to do with migrant workers' nationalities in the building sites. As introduced in the beginning of this dissertation, building sites in Milan have a rather heterogeneous character, in the sense that workers from different nationalities may work at the same time. On the other hand, Athenian building sites are "dominated" by migrants of Albanian origin which implies that Albanian builders in Athens have usually socialized with community networks. It might be assumed that Albanians in Athens have poorer linguistic skills than their co-nationals employed in Milan who were at times forced to speak Italian with other colleagues. In this respect, migrants in Italy seem more advantage to learn the Italian language that allows the expansion of social networks.

Concerning Albanian migrants in Milan, they may see their incomes decrease because of competition between them and workers of other nationalities. Even if the research did not involve workers of other nationalities, many Albanian in Milan claimed that Egyptian, Romanian and Moroccan colleagues are often paid less, and, as a result they may be excluded from the labour market. It is connected with their representations of being "the best workers", and for this reason they cannot accept low wages. It can partially be true, since Egyptians or Moroccans have different migration patterns (family migration vs male breadwinner migration), and different needs. On the other hand, Albanian male migrants largely live with their families in Italy, and it is expected that they have more monthly expenses. However, I found several Albanian workers who admitted that sometimes they have accepted to work with lower wages with respect to what they were used to earn. For this reason, and given the lack of

empirical material, I could not say that Albanians in Milan face more competition in the Milan's residential construction due to the presence of other nationalities.

As regards Trade Unions' role in both contexts, it might be said that only rarely Albanian migrants have referred to this actor when talking about their coping responses. Reference to Italian trade unions has been only by few respondents who have been provided services by lawyers collaborating with Trade Unions. Exception to this incidence have been the narrations of some migrants I encountered at the Milan School of Construction who followed formation courses for the use of new materials and to acquire skills in plastering. In this sense, it might be assumed that institutionalization of builders' formation through Trade Unions' initiatives in Milan may enable migrants to escape from their networks and "*follow the careers that their qualifications unlock*" (Thiel, 2007, p.243). On the other hand, in the Greek context, migrants' interaction with Trade Unions has been too limited, which was also expressly confirmed by the representative of the Builders' trade union of Athens. With regard to the Greek context, formation courses for builders are mostly organized by private companies that sell building materials, which privilege only those (self-employed) workers who are in contact with them (clients). All in all, no collective practices of resistance have been observed, confirming the difficulty of collective organisation and agency by migrant builders (Brentsen, 2015).

6.3.6 Relevance of geography in Albanians' practices

Geographic distance between Albania-Italy and Albania-Greece has been another factor that shaped Albanian migration patterns, since the first flows of immigrants in the early 1990s (Chapter 1). Comparing the two countries, Greece borders with Albania, and Athens is closer to any destination in the Albanian territory than Milan. Hence, geographic distance might affect Albanians' coping practices during the crisis, since it might be assumed that Albanian immigrants in Greece might opt to go back and forth in a more frequent way (circular migration, see for instance Maroukis and Gemi, 2013). Higher numbers of Albanian returnees from Athens are also due to the shorter distance between the two destinations. An indirect effect of the higher numbers of Albanian returnees from Greece may be considered the dissolution of networks. As a matter of fact, it might be assumed that due to the big number of Albanians who left Greece, Albanians' networks in Athens weakened more than those in Milan. On the other hand, Milan's proximity with EU countries might be another crucial factor that trigger Albanians' mobility to other EU countries, even with permanent or temporary aspirations for settlement.

6.3.7 Economic aspects and practices

Another dimension benchmark between the two case studies can be the economic situation of the two countries, and, in particular, that of Milan and Athens. Taking into consideration the rates of unemployment rates in both contexts, it may be considered that Albanian in Milan had more job opportunities not only in the construction sector, but also in other sectors. The gap regarding the available job opportunities becomes even wider if thinking on the concentration of Albanians in the Athenian construction sector (Psimennos, 2003; Maroukis, 2009). In this sense, Albanian builders in Athens run higher risk to remain entrapped into their networks (Chapter 3 and 5), whereas those in Milan have the possibility to seek job in other sectors in which their co-nationals have been employed. In view of the divergent economic situation of the two cities and the changing role of breadwinner in Albanian households, it may be assumed that Albanians in Milan have been favoured during unemployment periods, because demand for female domestic workers continued to be high in Milan (Ambrosini, Coletto and Guglielmi, 2014), whereas Greek families demand for migrant labour has been reduced very sharply (Maroukis, 2013). However, comparing job opportunities arising from higher levels of prosperity in Milan, it cannot be neglected the cost of living in Milan and its satellite municipalities. In this sense, an unemployed migrant in Athens might be in a better position during the crisis due to the lower cost of living, whereas unemployed builders in Milan have been in difficulty from the first day of unemployment due to the high monthly living costs.

Looking at Italy and Greece's fiscal policies, it may be said that Albanians in Greece faced higher barriers in making a living due to the cut of salaries and welfare benefits. All of my respondents in Greece claimed that they have seen their salaries decrease by up to 50-60% during the crisis, whereas formal contractual terms in the Italian construction sector have not been mentioned. In Italy, the introduction of a series of atypical contracts had been completed before 2008, and it may be said that it was the use of voucher system of payments that mostly constrained migrants' agency in construction during the last years.

6.4. Limitations and suggestions for further research

Although this dissertation has shed light on Albanian males and their households' practices, it lacks notably the women's perspective. Women's narrative could have served to analyse better the change of roles within migrants household at times of unemployment, and it might reveal further household practices to cope with crisis. The focus on women's view would also offer better understandings on the negotiations and reasoning on household decision-making.

It might have been also valuable to take into considerations returnees' perspective. Although I made a short travel to Albania, it has not been possible to carry out interviews with returnees due to the lack of time. Returnees could have shared their lived experiences and their motivations to leave Italy or Greece, contributing to the analysis of migrants' practices and power relations during the recession period.

A further limitation emerges from the type of the research method implied in the sense that working with migrant workers would have enabled to shed light to more practices undertaken in the workplace. Ethnographic works in building sites (Perrotta, 2011; Thiel, 2012a) have revealed how working time is negotiated by workers and how pace of work is a kind of resistance to employers' demands. Such practices have not been caught through in-depth interviews. Hence, it cannot be argued that all practices have been observed, and, furthermore, "space" dimension (De Certeau, 1984) could be described better. Both ethnographic research and women's perspective could contribute to investigate not only how migrants get by in economic terms, but also how migrants emotionally coped with the stress and anxiety that economic difficulties implicate.

The findings in Chapter 4 on informal employment demonstrate also a lack of research focusing on the demand side. As it has been particularly shown in the Greek context, where the client for services in construction can be at the same time the employer, clients' demand for undeclared service is considered extremely relevant. In Greece, Albanian migrants see clients' agency very significant, since their choice to apply for the building permit or not determines the existence of formal employment. However, it has been shown that there is some floor for bargaining between client and migrant worker, so that the latter be able to be declared for certain period of time. Taking also into considerations Greek clients' buyer power in times of economic recession, the demand of informal services would be increase (Buckley *et al.*, 2016). As for the Italian context, clients' agency does not affect the existence of formal employment, rather it may produce informality connected to tax evasion. In any case, when studying informal employment in residential construction, it is suggested to study not only the dyad employer and employee accounts, but a third social actor, that is the client, has to get into the game.

Another actor that should be studied when focusing on informal economic activities are the various intermediaries (Chapter 3). As already analysed, various types of informal intermediaries may have a crucial role in migrants' involvement in informality, because they are those who give information on job opportunities and match labour and demand side, in exchange of money. This actor could have been probably approached during participant observation.

Future research may also address better both transnational mobility of Albanian migrants in new European countries. Accompanying Albanian builders when they travel to work within the European construction sector could offer deeper insights on how migrants create new transnational spaces, and what kind of resources they use to achieve their goals. Further research may also examine Albanian migrants' settlement and insertion in the new labour markets, once they achieve to obtain the right to work and migrate permanently to the new destination country.

All in all, in this dissertation I gave some insights on Albanian migrant construction workers and their families coping practices since the onset of the crisis in 2008. Under these circumstances, it might be expected a radical change in Albanian migration patterns, mainly concerning the countries of destination for the next generation. Hence, the findings stimulate further research on the issue of transnational mobility and migrants' insertion in the new migratory destination.

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