



Running Case Study 11

Multiple sources of evidence

In the course of his research project, Mehmet has become more and more interested in the outcomes of migrant entrepreneurship; not just on an individual level, but also on a more aggregated level, the macro level of a neighbourhood. In the previous weeks, Mehmet had been an active networker and made contact with many entrepreneurs, but also with people running projects to stimulate the economic development in cities and neighbourhoods. Just yesterday, he had talked to Hans Visser, the deputy head of the police station Oosterpark, who told him how closer cooperation between the municipality, the police and local businessmen has helped to reduce vandalism and other civil crimes like shoplifting. Mr Visser explained that such initiatives also have a positive effect on the economic climate, as people would think twice before starting a business in a neighbourhood that is known for above-average crime rates. Mr Visser did not need to convince Mehmet about the importance of the external environment for new companies. For a business student, the environment is always a strategic factor to be considered. But Mehmet had become curious whether business also had a direct effect on the neighbourhood.

Suddenly, Mehmet had the design of his case studies before his eyes. His cases would not be different migrant businesses – he would investigate just one case, a typical migrant neighbourhood in Amsterdam. Mehmet chose the Oosterpark neighbourhood. In his eyes it was an ideal neighbourhood to study migrant entrepreneurship. Oosterpark is a residential neighbourhood close to the centre of Amsterdam. It was developed between 1880 and 1920; most houses are built from brick and mostly between three to five floors high. Between World War I and World War II, the neighbourhood attracted predominantly middle-income workers. But in the 1950s and 1960s, the area experienced a rapid decline, as people moved to the suburbs, preferring terraced houses with a small garden patch to flats in the city. In the 1980s that decline was reversed as migrants from Turkey, Morocco, but also the former Dutch colonies, settled in the neighbourhood. Today, the neighbourhood is multi-cultural with many small businesses owned by Dutch natives and migrants. Mehmet's real reason to choose Oosterpark was, however, that he wanted to live in Amsterdam. Studying in Maastricht, a small provincial capital in the south, was nice for a start, but now he wanted to live on his own in a real city. It had taken some time to convince his father that moving to Amsterdam would not jeopardize his work on his Master's project; with modern communication technologies, location does not matter anymore. But once he convinced him, his father offered him a small studio apartment on the 4th floor in one of the houses he owned in Amsterdam's Oosterpark. Actually, the first travel agency his father opened in Amsterdam was still located in that house.

Although Mehmet had already spoken to a couple of migrant entrepreneurs, up to now his investigations were not very systematic. Now he wanted to change this and for the next two weeks he had two objectives: (1) developing an interview guide and (2) writing a chapter describing the Oosterpark neighbourhood, as this would be the main context of his research.

He had already collected information brochures and policy reports from the town hall of Amsterdam East, the city district Oosterpark belonged to. Then he consulted the online service *Statline* of Statistics Netherlands to get some basic quantitative information on the neighbourhood. Today, Oosterpark is one of those multicultural neighbourhoods characterized by above-average crime rates and a relatively large share of people with a low income – average income is about €12,000 – on the one hand. On the other hand, the neighbourhood has a young age structure: more than two-thirds of the population is 45 or younger.

A couple of weeks ago, Mehmet had moved to his new apartment in Oosterpark. Now he was living right in the middle of the neighbourhood he wanted to investigate. Although he had to work hard on his research paper and, in addition, worked a couple of hours each week in his father's travel agency, he also had time to stroll through the neighbourhood. He usually took lunch outside and when he walked down the streets he observed the street life. He recognized that some migrant shopkeepers mainly sold to migrant customers, while other shopkeepers had much more diversified customers. But it was not only the differences in customers that caught his eyes, there was also something different about the shops themselves. In the following weeks, he studied the different shops in more detail and even bought something in each. He

recognized that the shops selling to more diverse customers were bigger, they employed not only family members, but also other people; some even employed people that did not belong to their ethnic group. One of the larger shops even mirrored the melting-pot Amsterdam had become; Mehmet had the impression that the shop had at least one employee from each United Nations member country. During a Skype talk, his advisor told him to structure his observations better. Up to then, Mehmet had usually simply written down some notes after each walk through the neighbourhood, but now he prepared a table (see example below) summarizing the information of the 32 shops he had observed so far.

Shop	Owner characteristics	Customer characteristics	Appearance of shop	Other
Chefchaouen	Moroccan, above 60, only family members are working there, owner speaks Dutch badly, son speaks Dutch well	Mainly Moroccan and other Arab nationalities	Small, sells mainly vegetables and fruit, small butcher shop, clean but house is a bit run down. Neighbouring shops, left side empty (to rent), right side phone shop, above shop three families, rented	When the sun is shining owner puts chairs on the pavement and sits there with other older Moroccans
Medeterraneo	Moroccan, owner is 32, friend of mine who took over the business from his father, 12 Moroccans working there and two Turks. Father the only other family member working there (sometimes his sisters help out), speak Dutch well	Mixed customers, many native Dutch shop there	Butcher shop, large fish counter, exotic vegetables and fruit. Large corner shop which is combined with shops of the right side house and back house. Delivery car can be parked in back yard. Houses owned by owner. Owner lives above shop and 5 other flats are rented	Delivers also to some restaurants in the neighbourhood
Guiyang	Chinese owner	Mixed	Sells only pre-packaged food from Asia and household ware, very small shop, rented shop, two families live above	

The table became larger and larger and did not fit a page anymore. He glued the pages together and the table was covering half of his desks. Looking at his desk Mehmet saw the table produced from his observations, the printouts from the secondary data, transcripts from his interviews and the notebooks in which he had documented all the informal talks he had with local politicians, business advisors and so on. It looked to him that he had material for five research projects, but how should he put all this information together?

- 1 How does Mehmet ensure the richness of evidence in this research project?
- 2 Mehmet has prepared a table to record his observations. Does this table structure his interviews too much?
- 3 Is triangulation a solution to combine the different sources and how would you proceed?