

## **PhD Research Project Design**

### **Entrepreneurship, Migration and Innovation: immigrants as innovative and replicative entrepreneurs**

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## **A. INTRODUCTION**

Entrepreneurs are commonly considered an asset for the economic development of the society: examples like Henry Ford, Oprah Winfrey and Steve Jobs are among the most famous individuals of the past century. But have we also wondered about the origin of their innovative ideas? And the social structure faced by such entrepreneurs? This research aims to discuss entrepreneurship and innovation with the case of immigrant business and their particular characteristics. My project is directed to understand innovation in the businesses of immigrant entrepreneurs from an individual and contextual perspective. There are positive and negative aspects for immigrant when introducing innovation; for example, innovation can bring personal wellbeing, promote upward mobility and at the same time waste resources in the generation of ideas and promote exploitation of other people. The social environment, where the economic activity takes place, plays a fundamental role to understand the emergence of firms and the way natives and immigrants face uncertainty, risk, knowledge and resources needed for any business endeavour. Different sectors of the market will show dissimilar introduction of innovation for the products and services they offer; immigrants are present in major numbers in certain sectors while being invisible in others.

Part of the existing literature on immigrant entrepreneurship limits to study the market created for and by ethnic communities; nevertheless, there are connections within the ethnic markets and with native markets. Immigrant entrepreneurs could be competitors and at the same time contributors for local economies. This topic builds a bridging path in the fields of management, economy and sociology, looking at the inequalities in the establishment of entrepreneurship and innovation for immigrants. Human, cultural, social and financial capitals of entrepreneurs are commonly mentioned to explain the selection of certain individuals to create market opportunities for their business (Aldrich, 2005; Portes, 1993; Thornton, 1999). Does a migratory condition in a receiving society could lead to the appearance of innovative ideas and processes to be used in entrepreneurial initiatives? One of the explanations rests in the social connections of entrepreneurs. Previous research, in related topics, have showed that economic processes depend on the connections with key actors and the distance to the source of ideas (Molina et al, 2015a; Granovetter, 2005), and at the same time those connections could be useful only under certain conditions (Rath, 2005, Kloosterman et al, 2010).

### **A.1. About the personal motivation and the author**

The idea of innovation in economic activities has attracted much attention, due to the notable impact of technological advancements and the use of internet apps in our everyday activities. Entrepreneurs are not exempt of this trend and have introduced technological changes and products as a way to gain advantages against the competition. Immigrant entrepreneurs, however, are still being studied under the assumption of their small size, marginal impact and poor level of innovation. With this research I explore the opportunities and difficulties for immigrant entrepreneurs to innovate in their business activities, taking into account their contextual scenario and their personal characteristics in terms of social, financial and human capital. My motivation for this research is to understand the impact of migration on innovative and replicative economic initiatives. I face the controversial topic about unequal opportunities for natives and for immigrants as well as the differences among male and female entrepreneurs. I consider that these differences and similarities can be better understood when combining different fields of social sciences.

This research will be located in Brescia and Amsterdam, with the intention to explore different contextual characteristics and cover specific economic sectors. The application for funding will cover the collection of data for the Italian case meanwhile the Dutch case will be collected during my visiting period in the UvA (Mid 2016 until end of 2017). This project involves various levels. I am a PhD student in Economic Sociology and Labour Studies promoted by NASP – Network for the advancement of social and Political Sciences. The administrative unit is the UNIMI where I have stayed during the first year of the program and developed the research project approved by the Academic Board. At the same time, the University of Brescia provides the scholarship during the 3 years that the program lasts. The supervision of Prof. Flaminio Squazzoni (UNIBS) and Prof. Jan Rath (UvA) has been invaluable and their advice and support encouraging to the development of the proposal. I previously used the methodology of social network analysis, central part of this research, in academic and professional aspects. Also quantitative skills were intensively trained during the first year of courses at the UNIMI meanwhile qualitative skills have been used in previous research for Masters Level. Currently, I belong to the IMISCOE Network of scholars and experts in the field of migration studies; also to the GECS Research Group (Experimental and Computational Sociology) lead by Prof. Squazzoni; and to the PhD-Lab group on ethnic entrepreneurship lead by Prof. Rath. These collaborations promote academic discussion while they encourage an interdisciplinary study. It also offers the possibility of further training and improvements of the research method in the remaining two years of PhD Program.

## **B. PROJECT DESCRIPTION**

This research proposes to study entrepreneurship and innovation centred on the business initiatives by immigrants. From the individual-agency perspective, the entrepreneur is an innovation- and creativity-driven individual, someone having human, cultural, social and financial capital (Aldrich, 2005; Thornton, 1999). As part of the society, according to Schumpeter, the entrepreneur has the function to “reform or revolutionize the pattern of production by exploiting an invention or, more generally, an untried technological possibility for producing a new commodity or producing an old one in a new way, by opening up a new source of supply of materials or a new outlet for products, by reorganizing an industry and so on” (1943; p.132). From those definitions, Baumol (2010) suggests to differentiate between innovative and replicative entrepreneurs. Innovation comes when new ideas are located and put into practice meanwhile replication refers to the mere organization of new business despite of having existing firms (p.18). This research will take a look at the conditions under which an immigrant entrepreneur can be a source of breakthrough and incremental innovation or to follow into replication practices of existing businesses. In the next sections I will briefly describe the main theoretical ideas for this research, followed by the research questions and the methodology to be used for collecting data.

### **B.1 THEORETICAL APPROACH**

I will explain the main theoretical concepts to be used for this research, but an extended discussion is part of the literature review document as attachment to this proposal. To start with, I discuss the definition of entrepreneurship. Using Schumpeter’s definition (1947), an entrepreneur creates something new as a response to changes in economic conditions. This reaction can take a form of creative or adaptive response. The entrepreneur is in charge of “doing new things or the doing of things that are already being done in a new way” (p.151). This definition equates entrepreneur with innovator with the function of creative destruction (Śledzik, Karol, 2013). But it also differentiates entrepreneurs from managers (Baumol, 2010). On further studies, the ideas of Aldrich (2005) and Burt (2000) discuss Schumpeter approach and add more characteristics to this definition. The advancement of their definitions is the focus on the activity of entrepreneurship and in the individuals ascribed to that activity. In like manner, an activity is performed by actors inserted in social roles. Aldrich (2005) added that entrepreneurship is the activity that creates a new organization. Furthermore, he chose to stress the social characteristics of immigrants when creating new organisations in the receiving society. One characteristic is the selection of the products and processes: moving from a replication of existing practices to the introduction of changes and improvements, nowadays

very related to the introduction of new technologies. Another characteristic includes the opportunity structure for the new firms, which changes according to the location where the business operates. The entrepreneurial project in a certain location tends to adapt when expanding: what is new –and innovative- in one place may be a replication or adaptation from another. To achieve a business initiative, Aldrich (2005) proposes that the individual-agency distinction of entrepreneurs can be understood as three kinds of capital: financial capital, human capital and social capital. The first two can be owned by individuals and therefore subject to personal transactions. In a unique way, social capital exists only when a relationship exists; therefore, two or more parties own the social capital and cannot transfer it to others. This research gives a larger attention to the social capital found inside a relationship; because people with specific human and financial resources are inquired to create and maintain those relevant connections (Burt, 2000:p.284). Burt (2000) contributes to understand entrepreneurship as a result of structural factors of the society: those who tend to be entrepreneurs are located in the converging location between two or more social networks. He used the term structural hole to refer to those spaces with few or no connections.

Innovation, closely connected to the original definition of a Schumpeterian entrepreneur, can have various faces. I follow the suggestion of Baumol (2010) to focus more on innovative entrepreneur as the pioneers but still considering replicative entrepreneurs as the followers. According to Ramella (2015a), innovation can be found in four segments and it can be accumulated in two ways (p.11). Those four segments refer to the innovation on different stages of the production of a good or service: the product, the process, the organisational and the marketing. The accumulation can be produced in an incremental form by adding small new changes to the existing state, or as radical form by totally changing by introducing something new. Baumol (2010) suggest developing the theory of innovative entrepreneurship as a form to understand the dynamic micro-economic characteristics of innovation and entrepreneurship. The upper technological level of innovation is commonly measured by the registry of patents (Hunt, 2011), for example at the biotechnology sector, the development of software or alternative energetic sources. At other levels of the market, the self-assessment of innovation is commonly used (GEM Consortium Database).

Two arguments are needed to relate entrepreneurship to innovation. First, a society with few mobility and a rigid stratification is assumed to have individuals with similar attitudes and behaviours (Smith and Powell, 2005); i.e. as dense, redundant networks. To be an innovative entrepreneur is more likely when introducing from one group to another a flow of new ideas, resources and information. Start a new venture helps when the entrepreneur know a certain person who is most likely to know the kind of person needed (Burt, 2000:p.287). On

another scenario, societies where connections among groups is encouraged and dense; i.e. open and sparse networks, could trigger cumulative innovation as a results of mutual exchange in the same groups at the same time. The limitation is that even in the most open societies, individuals will tend to spend time in similar circles, frequenting similar places and interacting with similar others (Burt, 2000:p.285). Second, Baumol suggest that innovation is predominantly present in small-firms (2010: p.26-7) with funding coming from large consortiums. He analyses the American model where the breaking-through innovation was developed by small-firms meanwhile the incremental innovation was improved by large companies. Small firms would follow the trend proposed by Portes (1998) that sources of information and resources are more useful and credible when face-to-face interaction exists instead of impersonal contact. The capacity of entrepreneurs to identify people in their range who can be useful or unhelpful to their business idea could be a factor to explain innovative ideas. Moreover, when there is an opportunity for innovation, then the close circle of people around the entrepreneur can give rewards or punishments for such idea. The social pressure to act according to the “right thing to do” could mitigate the risk-propensity, even if there are greater rewards to do otherwise (Portes 1998:p15-6)

Now, I follow four arguments to connect innovation and entrepreneurship with the social, economic and political conditions of immigrant. First, the activity<sup>1</sup> of entrepreneurship implies an action performed by certain individuals and linked to other people within a given society. Immigrants are a great example to study how the actions and links of immigrants evolve in a host society. Entrepreneurs with immigrant origin are connected to networks where information is different than in those networks of entrepreneurs with native origin (Aldrich and Waldinger, 1990). Those connections are used not only for exchange and transactions, but additionally as emotional, legal and cultural support to the new business start-up (Portes and Sensenbrenner, 1993; Croes and Hooimeijer, 2012). Second, the activity to create a new organisation carries within the reproduction of social inequalities, hierarchies, traditions and so on. For immigrant entrepreneurs, Aldrich found that among co-ethnics the tendency to join together is a common practice which reproduces the barriers to form mixed teams (2005:p.461). Depending on the level of interactions, immigrant entrepreneurship could challenge the social order or it could help to reproduce it (ibid: p.451). Third, the legitimacy and legality of an immigrant business is connected to the acceptance of the local legal framework and existing economic behaviours. Rath (2005) illustrated how local economies

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<sup>1</sup> Aldrich stressed Schumpeter’s approach of locating entrepreneurship by activity and not by individuals, in its own social and historical context. Focus on activity shifts the scope of entrepreneurial activity to a social action which can be described as a behaviour to open new markets, to launch new production methods and to create new goods. (2005:p.455)

have barriers and openings to be faced by immigrant entrepreneurs. Immigrant entrepreneurs can have their own practices when focusing on the ethnic demand just as well as they could stick strongly to the practices of natives attempting to blend into the mainstream receiving society. Fourth, the status of individuals who are entrepreneurs is considered to trigger upward mobility (Baumol, 2010). According to Aldrich, people who engage in entrepreneurship forge new identities as business owners, what gives them a new occupational status among the immigrant community (2005:p.468). Identity could act as a catalyser to achieve integration of entrepreneurs and their families. The social capital and prestige of immigrants can be measured by the type of relationships that can be accessed from one person to a range of close contacts (Molina et al, 2015a).

Finally, differences for males and females have been noted. There are different levels of human, social and financial capital for females compared to males (Stenvenson, 1986). Baycan et al (2003) when studying Turkish female entrepreneurs in the Netherlands suggest that women use their own business using ethnic strategies and female condition on their favour. Female entrepreneurship got more attention when linked to development studies and emergence of small firms. Lee (2015) affirms that an alternative effect of the determinants for entrepreneurship and innovation might be found when gender situation is added to the model. This author studies the role of social capital triggering female entrepreneurship in a different form than for males. The literature review by Pogessi, Mari and de Vita (2015) identify the main trends of research of the last 15 years for female entrepreneurship, they point out that immigrant female entrepreneurship has not received much attention and it requires more studies to explain the role of females when forming their business.

## **B.2 RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

**Central question:** What are the social, economic and political determinants for the innovativeness of male and female immigrant entrepreneurs?

**Core argument:** I posit that the main determinants of entrepreneurs' innovativeness are the critical interaction of human, social and financial capital in a sufficiently conducive institutional and economic context

### **Sub-questions**

- RQ1: What is the structure of the market where immigrant entrepreneurship appears in terms of size, competition, technological development and openness to innovation? This question aims to find key conditions in the selected target market to promote replication or incremental/disrupting innovation.

- RQ2: What is the appropriate institutional framework which prompts innovation for business created by entrepreneurs? The answer compares existing policies and institutions which have been considered to promote innovation.
- RQ3: Is there a training and experience gap by migrant entrepreneurs reducing their innovativeness? The answer will hint on the differentiation between replicative and innovative entrepreneurs based on their level of education and type of occupation.
- RQ4: Which types of personal networks are more likely to promote or inhibit innovation for the business of immigrant entrepreneurs? The different background of connections when reaching resources could show various types of innovation.
- RQ5: Can ethnic and family networks complement for funding and income needed by immigrant entrepreneurs to include innovative practices? Solidarity and large-kin networks of immigrants might have the function of complementing for lack of funds and income through standard economic mechanisms, e.g., banks.

### **B.3 ARTICLE-BASED DISSERTATION with Research Methodology**

This project will be written as an article dissertation. The first article is a theoretical contribution based on a literature review of current discussions and a proposed model to understand innovation and entrepreneurship from the migratory experiences and gender of the individual entrepreneurs. The second article explains the contextual determinants where innovation/replication has been identified and where immigrant entrepreneurial groups are largely concentrated. The third and fourth articles are the application of the theoretical model to two separate empirical cases where individual determinants are analysed in a particular context. The results will refine the theoretical ideas proposed and contrast the impact of immigration on innovation. Both empirical cases explore the role of gender in innovation and immigrant entrepreneurship. The methodology for each article will be explained in the following description.

#### **Article 1 - Theoretical proposal to understand innovation in immigrant entrepreneurs**

This article aims to describe the theoretical framework to be proposed, which includes the role of innovation for immigrant entrepreneurs in comparison to native entrepreneurs as well as the gender differences for innovation and entrepreneurship. With this article, the main research question will be answered with a theoretical model about the introduction of innovation by immigrant and native entrepreneurs. Entrepreneurs are relevant actors in the economic sector given their role in creating firms, demanding labour and satisfying the needs



of customers. This article explains the social, economic and political determinants faced by entrepreneurs when innovation can be used in their own business initiatives (Rath and Swagerman, 2015). The review of the existing literature will explain the divergent conditions for immigrant and natives when it is time to have new products, new processes and new organisational strategies. The importance is to describe the main factors that could trigger or hinder innovation. This article will define the differences between self-employment and entrepreneurship, immigrant origin, gender differences, economic sectors selected and institutional frameworks.

The proposed methodology for this article is a systematic literature review (SLT) based on the selection of publications for the analysis of the content published. The selected literature comes from journals of four different fields: migrations studies, feminism, management and entrepreneurship/innovation. The keywords for searching the articles will be: ethnic\*immigrant entrepreneurship, female entrepreneurship, immigrant\*ethnic innovation and female innovation. I would like to check, at least, the last 10 years of publications from the following journals:

Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies – Impact factor 0.93	Entrepreneurship: Theory and Practice – Impact factor 3.1
Ethnic and Racial Studies – Impact factor 1.7	Research Policy – Impact factor 3.1
Journal of Urban Economis – Impact factor 1.9	Technovation – Impact factor 2.5
Signs – Impact factor NA	Industry and Innovation Journal – Impact factor 0.8
Journal of Management – Impact Factor 6.1	Journal of Product, Innovation and Management – Impact factor 1.7
International Journal of Entrepreneurial Behaviour and Research – Impact factor NA	Journal of Small Business Management – Impact factor 1.4

### **Article 2 – Contextual determinants: policies and institutions**

This second article will focus on RQ1 and RQ2 to describe the contextual and institutional framework and identify the innovation level of selected sectors where immigrant entrepreneurs are largely found. The social environment, where the economic activity can take place, plays a fundamental role to explain how institutional settings where business are located matter (Regini, 2014) and the way that natives and immigrants face that situation (Kloosterman et al, 2010). The description will include information from databases such as the European Innovation Score and the Global Innovation Index. It will compare the ranking with those of the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor. Those descriptions will show differences on innovation and entrepreneurship based on factors like the levels of education, technological

development, business competition, customer preferences, governmental policies and funding schemes. The situation for Italy and the Netherlands will be compared with the presence of self-employed natives and self-employed immigrants as a proxy for entrepreneurs.

The key point of this analysis is that there is no registry of the level of innovation targeted at immigrants, so the description of national policies to promote innovation for immigrants and natives will be considered for one country who applies them. The methodology used for this article will be descriptive statistics and a policy analysis. For the policy analysis, the existence of national normative and the outcomes will contribute to find a set of institutional and economic context where innovation is more likely to appear. The public policies will be collected from national plans to promote self-employment, entrepreneurship and investment in research and development. The analysis of sectors where large numbers of immigrant is present can give some hints if innovation is found there, based on ethnic communities and competition with other entrepreneurs. According to previous research, immigrant entrepreneurs are mostly located in wholesale, retail and restaurant (Kloosterman et al, 1999; pg.9) and also in the sector of food and care-services (Ambrosini, 2012). The analysis of gender difference on their presence as entrepreneurs and in their conditions to innovate will contribute to the study of the particularities faced by males and females in a given economic sector (Lee, 2015).

### **Article 3 – Case analysis based on empirical evidence**

These third and fourth articles will focus on RQ3, RQ4 and RQ5 as the individual characteristics of entrepreneurs concerning their human, social and financial capital. The focus on social, financial and human capital (Aldrich, 2005) allows characterizing innovative and replicative entrepreneurs which can vary for immigrant and native population. The education and occupation level will be collected to describe the human capital, the formation of ties with particular individuals as a social capital and the possession or origin of funding as financial capital. The study of the transfer of resources and ideas will be approached from an ego perspective. This approach means that personal in-depth interviews will gather information about their personal and their business characteristics. The comparison of ego characteristics among natives and immigrants has the potential to reveal the use of different individual capital for specific economic and social activities. Waldinger (2011) stresses the role of transnational connections used for economic purposes. Other authors are more specific in the use of social connections to exchange resources for entrepreneurial ideas as: remittances, funding, clients, goods, services (Ozgen, Nijkamp and Poot; 2012). This data collection will gather empirical information to picture the use of individual characteristics in the implementation of innovative

or replicative practices in business ideas. The sources and mechanisms involved in the production of innovative ideas can show the particular use of individual characteristics to face a social context where to innovate. The role of immigrant communities will also be included since there are several studies verifying the effect of membership for the transference of resources (Rath, 2005), for the levelling of norms (Portes and Sensennbrenner, 1993) and for social control (Aldrich and Waldinger, 1990). The cities of Brescia in Italy and Amsterdam in the Netherlands are selected due to their high percentage of immigrant population and immigrant entrepreneurship. I follow on previous findings showing that sectors like the following are more likely to follow on cases of immigrant entrepreneurship:

- Restaurants/Food
- Retail/Commerce
- Personal services/Consultancy

The methodology of research combines qualitative techniques such as in-depth interviews and ego-network roster with quantitative methods such as digital surveys to measure innovation from the side of the costumers. The interview will content information to be used as attributes for each person regarding:

- Education: high, medium or low skilled
- professional experience: relevant or not to the occupation, occupational status
- migration history: time of residence abroad, past migratory places
- economic activities: type of business and sector
- funding methods: remittances, savings, credit
- entrepreneurial experience: family history and previous businesses

The roster, part of the interview, will identify other people connected to their business as well as their function: kinship, free time activities, social clubs, ethnic community, religious services, political activism, legal advice, financial advice, employment search and supply chain. Their use on immigrant and native population is valuable to reveal the role of relationships and the access to various forms of capital (Lin, 1999; Molina et al, 2015a-b; Snijders, 1999; Vacca, 2014; Solano, 2015).

The selection of respondents will come from contacts provided by Chambers of Commerce, Consulates, Immigrants' Associations, Trade Associations and Churches. The lists provided will be filtered by economic sector into: restaurants/food, retail/wholesale and professional services/consultancy where immigrants are largely located (Kloosterman et al, 1999: p.9). The questionnaire will follow a trial period with few respondents in January 2016. Afterwards, the collection of data will begin with the case of Brescia in the first quarter of 2016

followed in the third quarter of 2016 by Amsterdam. The trial period will be useful to choose the most useful questions, to generate an indicator of innovation of immigrant business and to select the appropriate roster to collect network data among resource-generator, name-generator and position-generator methods. Additionally, an online survey distributed among the costumers of entrepreneurs is used for the assessment of innovation to include their perception of innovation compared to the self-perception of the entrepreneur. The four theoretical aspects of innovation (product, organisation, process and marketing) will be asked and divided among replicative and innovative practices.

For all information concerning statistics I will use SPSS. Also, the measure of innovation by costumers will be transferred to SPSS for cleaning and for treating it. Atlas-ti will be used to codify information from the policy analysis and also from the interviews. The existing content will be transformed into categories to explain the different expressions of human, social and financial capital. Network data will be analysed using UCINET and then later using R to handle the information at a larger scale. The used measures for ego-network analysis will be: compared density of the different ego networks, repetition of alters (in/out degree), homophily among ego and alters and location nearby bridges or brokers (betweenness and closeness) (Bruggeman, 2008).

#### **Transversal topic – Analysis of differences conditionalities by gender**

The third and fourth articles will touch the topic of gender difference when using the available network of contacts. The configuration of networks is different for male and female entrepreneurs because males have advantages with the existence of role-models, contacts and funding (Lee, 2015). A description of the configuration of a personal network will offer differences by gender, which will be contrasted as well at the level of the introduction of innovation. In labour studies, it is known that female immigrants have a worst position when looking for jobs as well as segregation for particular sectors of labour (Caparros en Navarro, 2010). When applying this situation to the creation of business and the capacity to innovate, the network of females have been observed to be mainly composed by males (Lee, 2015). The introduction of immigration into this study will give a better explanation of female immigrant entrepreneurship. The use of in-depth interviews will be particularly focused on this topic to understand the use of the personal contact as a capacity to innovate and to create business. It is expected that the empirical cases found are much less in number than male entrepreneurship and therefore the use of qualitative methods is encouraged.

#### D. TIMETABLE FOR RESEARCH ACTIVITIES

Tasks	2015		2016				2017			
	July-September	October - December	January - March	April - June	July-September	October - December	January - March	April -June	July-September	October - November
Final Research proposal	X	Approved November								
Conferences	IMISCOE				X				X	
Theoretical Model	X	X	X							
Contact people for fieldwork			IT	IT	IT/NL	NL	NL			
Preparation of research tools/ questionnaires		X	X	X						
Application to funding for fieldwork		X	X							
Application for visiting period abroad		X								
Collection of policies and contextual information		X	X	X						
Collection of relational data			IT	IT	NL	IT/NL	NL	NL		
Qualitative interviews			IT	IT	NL	IT/NL	NL	NL		
Online Survey			IT	IT	NL	IT/NL	NL	NL		
Schools on methodology			X		X				X	X
Final draft of First Article					X					
Final draft of Second Article							X			
Final draft of Third Article								X		
Final draft of Fourth Article									X	
Final version of complete dissertation										X

\*IT = Italy and NL = The Netherlands

## **Funding**

This research will be funded by the Scholarship provided by the ESLS PhD Program, including the research funds assigned as part of the training activities for 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> years. The application for a research grant will be used to fund the collection of data for the Italian case, and the details of the required amounts can be seen in the Attachment 1.

The period spent as visiting researcher in the University of Brescia will be used to open a call for an internship of 6 months for one Master student to be an assistant on data collection and translation from Italian-English.

The period spent as visiting researcher in the University of Amsterdam will be used to strengthen the abilities to analyse the data obtained and to collect empirical cases on the Dutch Case. It will run parallel to some activities on the Italian counterpart and therefore collaboration will be promoted and encouraged.

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