

Examining Transformative Agency within Constrained Contexts: A Comparative Case Study of Refugee Camp Entrepreneurship



University of Leeds

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فَإِنَّ مَعَ الْعُسْرِ يُسْرًا ۝ إِنَّ مَعَ الْعُسْرِ يُسْرًا ۝ ٦

So, surely with hardship comes ease.

Surely with `that` hardship comes `more` ease.

[Q94:5-6]

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Abstract

This study examines the transformative capacity of refugee entrepreneurs within constrained institutional contexts (CICs) through a comparative case study of the Zaatari and Azraq refugee camps in the host nation of Jordan. Employing Strong Structuration Theory (SST) as a theoretical lens, the research explores: how institutional constraints enable and constrain refugee agency, whether refugee entrepreneurs preserve or challenge existing structures, and under what conditions do severely constrained actors develop immunity from institutional control. The empirical evidence shows intricate dynamics whereby identical institutional structures and humanitarian agencies, housing the same displaced Syrian population, produce fundamentally divergent ecosystems. Zaatari evolved into an economic outlier with over 1,800 businesses, becoming Jordan's fourth-largest city, while its sister camp maintained just 375 regulated enterprises under comprehensive institutional oversight. Drawing on 48 interviews, observation, and naturalistic data, this study employs qualitative comparative analysis through retrodution (critical realism) and methodological bracketing (context-conduct analysis). This study demonstrates that transformative capacity surfaces primarily from asymmetries between external institutional constraints and internal collective capabilities.

In sum, this research makes three theoretical contributions. First, it reframes institutional void theory by demonstrating that voids function along an enabling-constraining spectrum depending on temporal emergence, spatial-demographic configuration, and regulatory variance. Second, it introduces the concept of shadow institutions as dual-functioning mechanisms that both erode formal structures and bridge individual agency into collective transformative capacity. Third, it extends SST by showing that transformative outcomes depend on the specific weighting between external structures (ES) and internal structures (IS) at their intersection. The findings challenge assumptions of policy transferability in humanitarian contexts and highlight how comprehensive institutional design can inadvertently constrain economic self-sufficiency for refugee populations. This research provides a framework for understanding how severely constrained actors circumvent and ultimately reshape the institutional structures that constrain them, with implications extending beyond refugee studies to broader questions of agency, institutional change, and marginalised populations.

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Ethics Approval

I confirm that the appropriate ethical approval was obtained from the University of Leeds Ethics Committee (Reference: AREA FREC 2023-0475-779) on 15 July 2023 (Appendix A), and that the subsequent camp access permission was granted by the Jordanian Ministry of Interior on 29 May 2023 (Appendix B) for fieldwork and data collection purposes.

This research used generative AI tools following the University of Leeds ethical framework (University of Leeds, 2025), with permitted use in the AMBER assistive category (Appendix A). I completed mandatory Generative AI training on 14 October 2025 via the University of Leeds Minerva portal. AI tools had specific roles in this research: Claude (Anthropic) translated Arabic content into English, cleaned up interview transcripts by correcting transcription errors, and retrieved first-order expressions (i.e. interviewee quotes) to support theme formulation during data analysis. Microsoft Copilot assisted with proofreading draft chapters and converting references to Leeds Harvard format.

List of Abbreviations

AMOIP	Ability Motivation Opportunity Institution Process
ANT	Actor-Network-Theory
CAMO	Context Agency Mechanism Outcomes
CIC	Constrained Institutional Contexts
CR	Critical Realism
ES	External Structures
EU	European Union
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GEM	Global Entrepreneurship Monitor
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
IS	Internal Structures
ISIS	Islamic State of Iraq and Syria
IT	Information Technology
MSA	Modern Standard Arabic
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
RCE	Refugee Camp Entrepreneurship
RE	Refugee Entrepreneurship
RQ	Research Question
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SME	Small to Medium Enterprise
SRAD	Syrian Refugees Affairs Directorate
SSI	Semi Structured Interview
SST	Strong Structuration Theory
ST	Structuration Theory
TEA	Total Entrepreneurial Activity
UN	United Nations
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNRWA	United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees
WEIRD	Western Educated Industrialised Rich and Democratic samples
WWI/II	World War I & II

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.0. Research Background

As of June 2025, 117.3 million people worldwide had been forcibly displaced from their homes due to persecution, conflict, or human rights violations (UNHCR, 2025). Among these, 42.5 million are estimated to be refugees. The 1951 Refugee Convention defines a refugee as an individual who has fled across international borders due to well-founded fear of persecution and cannot safely return to their country of origin (UNHCR, 1951). Notably, 66 per cent of the world's refugees seek refuge in neighbouring countries (UNHCR, 2025), highlighting the disproportionate burden borne by nations least equipped to host such populations. This burden is evidenced by the widespread use of refugee camps, particularly in nations spanning the Global South. The UNHCR estimates that 6.6 million refugees live in refugee camps worldwide, thus representing approximately 16 per cent of the world's refugee population (UNHCR, 2021). If refugee camps collectively constituted a nation, their population would hypothetically rank 110th globally (Figure 1).

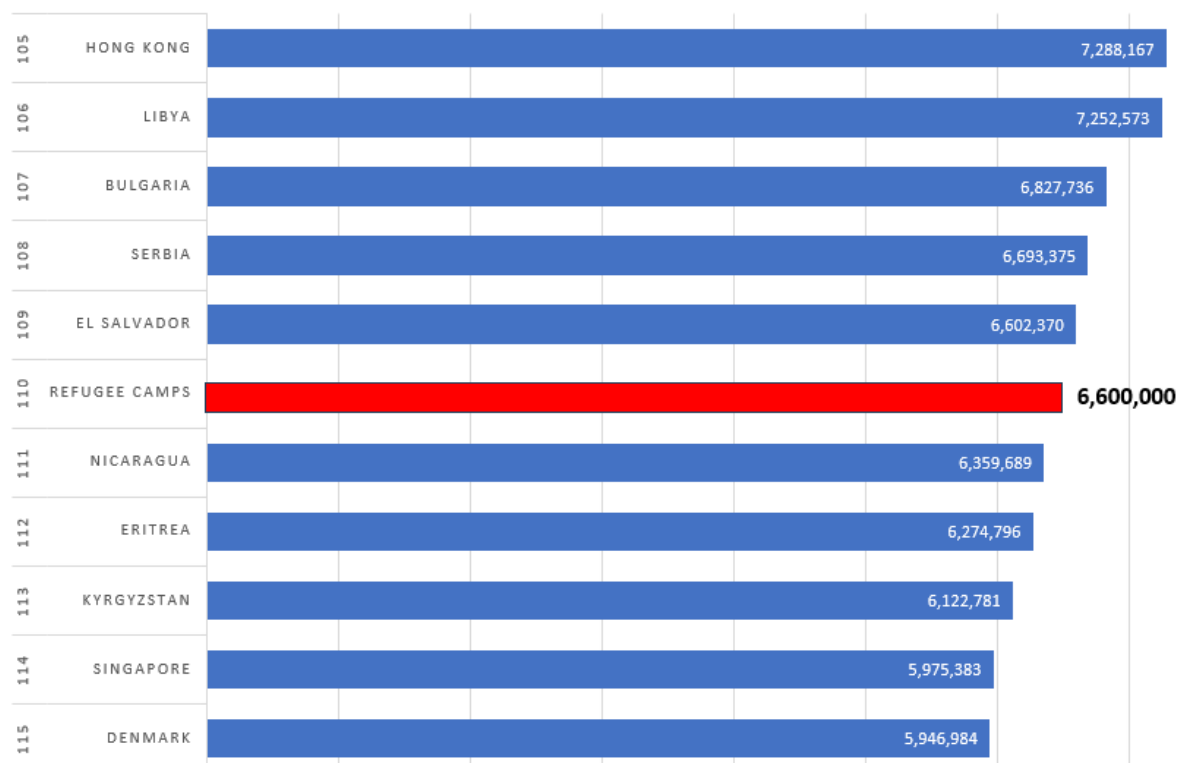


Figure 1: The number of refugees residing in refugee camps (UNHCR 2021)

This figure however is likely to rise owing to recent displacements in Sudan (12 million), Ukraine (9.4 million), DR Congo (8 million) and Gaza (1.9 million) (IOM, 2025; UNHCR, 2025; UNRWA, 2025).

In response to the global refugee crisis, the academic study of refugee entrepreneurship (RE) has grown considerably (Desai et al., 2021). RE refers to business activities undertaken by individuals who have been forcibly displaced from their country of origin due to conflict or persecution (Newman et al., 2024). Yet the specific study of refugee camp entrepreneurship (RCE) remains relatively underexplored compared to studies of RE in European and other Western host contexts (Lang et al., 2024). Recent systematic reviews of RE spotlight the Global North landscape in nearly 60 per cent of extant RE publications (Abebe, 2023; Heilbrunn and Iannone, 2020). Despite the overwhelming majority of refugees residing in neighbouring countries, often confined within the Global South, research remains disproportionately focused on RE in Global North settings. This research bias further reflects the broader empirical fixation on Western, Educated, Industrialised, Rich and Democratic (WEIRD) samples in entrepreneurship scholarship (Shepherd et al., 2025).

Conceptually, extant RE scholarship exhibits persistent tensions between structural determinism and individualism (Lang et al., 2024; Refai et al., 2025). These competing perspectives accentuate a fundamental puzzle in that dominant theoretical frameworks struggle to explain why seemingly identical refugee cohorts, situated within similarly constrained institutional contexts (CICs), exhibit fundamentally divergent economic outcomes (Beener, 2015; Betts et al., 2017; Chatty, 2016; Davis, 2019). Such differentials suggest that refugee agents possess varying capacities for transformative potential. This gap motivates the central aim of this research study: to examine the transformative capacity of refugee entrepreneurs within CICs.

This thesis addresses this research aim through the theoretical sample of the Zaatari and Azraq refugee camps in the host nation of Jordan, two settlements housing Syrian refugees that exhibit remarkably different entrepreneurial landscapes despite common origins. Zaatari, established in 2012 during the height of the Syrian crisis, evolved into an economic outlier (Beener, 2015). Described by analysts as Jordan's fourth-largest city (Crisp, 2015; McGhee, 2017; Weston, 2015), with over 1,800 autonomous businesses operating within its commercial districts (UNHCR, 2022). Azraq, opened two years later in 2014 following meticulous planning

informed by the antecedent case of Zaatari, however maintains just 375 regulated businesses under comprehensive institutional oversight, and centralised market structures that systemically constrain autonomous RE.

This juxtaposition therefore presents an interesting case study. If entrepreneurial outcomes are largely determined by individualistic characteristics, cultural backgrounds, or entrepreneurial propensity, then these camps should in theory exhibit similar patterns given their shared origins. Conversely, if outcomes were solely determined by institutional structures, the camps should converge given their establishment by homogeneous institutional structures under universal host nation policies. The stark contrast between these individual cases therefore suggests that transformative capacity surfaces from specific configurations of structure-agency interactions that extant RE scholarship has yet to determine. Accordingly, the use of a structure-agency based theoretical framework such as Structuration Theory (Giddens, 1984; Stones, 2005) has the potential to decipher this conundrum. However, to date, its application to both constrained entrepreneurship and RE/RCE scholarship more specifically is limited.

1.1. Research Problem and Theoretical Gaps

Entrepreneurial agency has been defined as the individual or collective power to shape environments (Brändle and Kuckertz, 2023). However, not all environments or social structures are equally conducive to change; some contexts, namely refugee camps, impose severe institutional constraints that function to significantly limit agency (Harima and Plak, 2025). Within these CICs, RCE features as an important economic activity towards attaining self-sufficiency for many encamped refugees (Betts et al., 2017).

Despite its growing importance and amidst the continuing refugee crisis, current RE scholarship exhibits several limitations that this research addresses. First, the field demonstrates pronounced geographic bias toward Global North cases (Heilbrunn and Iannone, 2020), in spite of the overwhelming majority of refugees being hosted in developing countries. This geographical skew consequently limits the understanding of how entrepreneurship unfolds under extreme constraints and within institutional environments characterised by comprehensive control. Second, existing research relies heavily on single-case studies that prevent comparative analysis necessary for identifying causal mechanisms (Newman et al., 2024). Third, the field suffers from theoretical fragmentation between perspectives

emphasising structural constraints versus individual characteristics, coupled with a top-down bias that neglects their dynamic interplay (Lang et al., 2024; Welter, 2011).

Most fundamentally, current scholarship lacks the application of theoretical frameworks that adequately account for the recursive relationship between entrepreneurial agency and institutional change (Abebe, 2023). Dominant theories within extant RE scholarship include mixed embeddedness (Kloosterman et al., 1999) and institutional void (Mair and Marti, 2009) theory. However, both theories treat structures as relatively static contexts within which actors operate, thus failing to contextualise how entrepreneurial action itself transforms these very structures. Recent calls for more nuanced approaches acknowledge that entrepreneurship scholarship has been plagued by persistent dichotomies positioning entrepreneurs as either outliers or passive victims of structural constraints, thereby failing to optimally theorise the middle ground wherein agency and structure constitute each other (Refai et al., 2025).

This theoretical gap proves particularly salient in CICs like refugee camps, where formal and informal institutional arrangements exhibit dynamic shaping capabilities for entrepreneurial possibilities (de la Chaux and Haugh, 2020). Existing frameworks struggle to explicate the variation in entrepreneurial outcomes across homogenous contexts (Solomon et al., 2021), or to account for how some individuals or groups present with the notion of ‘immunisation to institutional effects’ (McMullen et al., 2021, p.1210), the capacity or potential to operate with relative autonomy from formal institutional control. Understanding these intricate dynamics therefore requires a theoretical framework capable of contextualising both dimensions simultaneously. Such a framework should combine the top-down contextual effects (i.e. how institutional structures shape entrepreneurship activity) with bottom-up agentic processes (i.e. how entrepreneurial action transforms those structures) (Welter, 2011). Most entrepreneurship scholarship implicitly assumes a “one-way relationship” between the business activity and the respective context rather than acknowledging the “recurring links” between these dimensions (Welter, 2011, p. 175-176). In similar vein, extant RE scholarship predominantly examines these top-down effects (Abebe, 2023), thus overlooking the bottom-up processes through which refugee entrepreneurs transform institutional contexts. A comprehensive theoretical framework for RCE must therefore account for this bidirectional relationship, examining how institutional contexts shape RE and how refugee entrepreneurial practices themselves also reshape those very contexts.

1.2. Research Aim and Questions

This thesis addresses these theoretical gaps through the following research aim: *To examine the transformative capacity of refugee entrepreneurs within constrained institutional contexts (CICs)*. Specifically, this research investigates how refugee entrepreneurial agency interacts with institutional structures to produce varying entrepreneurial outcomes across contexts. By adopting a comparative approach across two Syrian refugee camps in Jordan, this study examines the recursive interplay between entrepreneurial action and institutional change, thus moving beyond static conceptualisations of structure or agency to study their unique configurations. Refugee camp environments serve as social laboratories for observing entrepreneurial agency within CICs, thereby offering ideal conditions to examine how institutional constraints either suppress or enable transformative entrepreneurial action.

This central aim is operationalised through three specific research questions (RQ):

RQ1: How do constrained institutional contexts constrain and enable refugee agency?

RQ2: Do refugee entrepreneurs contribute to the preservation, modification, or challenging of existing structures, and how?

RQ3: Do refugee entrepreneurs exhibit immunisation from institutional structures, and how does this immunity translate into transformative capacity?

RQ1 establishes how CICs shape entrepreneurial possibilities along an enabling-constraining spectrum, thereby challenging the simplistic dichotomy of institutions as either barriers or enablers to entrepreneurship action. RQ2 examines entrepreneurial responses along a transformative-reproductive continuum, again challenging the binary framings of refugees as either change agents or passive actors. RQ3 synthesises these insights to theorise the conditions under which constrained actors develop immunity from institutional control and how this immunity translates into capacity for both structural (i.e. external) and human (i.e. internal) transformation.

1.3. Theoretical Framework and Analytical Approach

This research employs Strong Structuration Theory (Stones, 2005) as its primary analytical framework. SST provides a conceptual toolkit for examining the relationship between structure

and agency through its quadripartite framework distinguishing between *external structures* (i.e. rules, resources, and power relations in broader contexts), *internal structures* (i.e. agents' dispositions, knowledge, and interpretive schemas), *active agency* (agents' capacity for reflexive intervention), and *outcomes* (i.e. the reproduction or transformation of structures through action).

Critically, SST is bifunctional, thus serving as both a theoretical lens and providing its own bespoke analytical framework known as methodological bracketing (Elkafrawi et al., 2022; Kholeif and Jack, 2018). Methodological bracketing concerns the analytical separation of context (i.e. external structural conditions) and conduct (i.e. agentic responses) followed by their subsequent integration (Kennedy et al., 2021). This approach facilitates the systematic examination of how institutional arrangements shape entrepreneurial possibilities (i.e. agents in context) and how refugee entrepreneurs respond to these conditions (i.e. conduct of agents), before integrating these dimensions to understand their interaction and subsequent outcomes. This methodological frame attempts to remedy the inclination in social science research to either privilege structure or agency without adequately theorising their dynamic interplay (Nicholson et al., 2014), a limitation particularly pronounced in entrepreneurship scholarship (Refai et al., 2025).

The research adopts a Critical Realist (CR) philosophical underpinning, thus recognising stratified levels of reality (Bhaskar, 1989). These levels are threefold: the empirical level (i.e. observable phenomena), the actual level (i.e. events and processes that are observed or not), and the real level (i.e. underlying root-cause mechanisms) (Fletcher, 2017). This ontological position facilitates the notion of retroductive reasoning (Bhaskar, 1979), working backward from observed divergent entrepreneurial outcomes between Zaatari and Azraq to theorise the underlying mechanisms generating these differences. CR proves particularly appropriate for CICs where power asymmetries shape what becomes observable and where understanding requires moving beyond the superficial aesthetics to identify deeper causal dynamics.

1.4. Research Design and Methodology

This study employs comparative case research design (Eisenhardt, 2021), examining Zaatari and Azraq as theoretical samples exhibiting common antecedents (Syrian refugee populations, same host nation, identical humanitarian agencies) yet producing divergent entrepreneurial

outcomes. This polar type sampling strategy enables theory-building through analytical replication logic (Yin, 2009), where each case serves to confirm, extend, or challenge emerging theoretical propositions. The comparative design enables investigation of causal mechanisms, as contrasting cases experiencing similar institutional contexts yet producing divergent outcomes help identify the contingent factors and processes shaping variation.

Data collection proceeded through multiple methods including naturalistic data (Silverman, 2021) (i.e. policy documents, UNHCR statistics, news archives), researcher observation during fieldwork visits, and semi-structured interviews with 48 participants including refugee entrepreneurs, UN representatives, camp administrators, guides, and translators. Fieldwork in both camps occurred during 2023-2024, with access negotiated through both the Syrian Refugees Affairs Directorate (SRAD) and the UNHCR standard operating procedures (SOP). The research employed within-method triangulation, strategically deploying different data collection approaches when constraints in one method necessitated alternatives, thus strengthening validity through multiple sources of evidence.

Analysis combined SST's context-conduct analytical bracketing with systematic data structuring (Gioia, 2021). First-order coding captured participants' terms and meanings (i.e. verbatim statements), second-order analysis organised these into theoretical categories, and aggregate dimensions identified overarching themes. This iterative process proceeded separately for context analysis (identifying enabling-constraining institutional dimensions) and conduct analysis (mapping transformative-reproductive entrepreneurial responses) before integration to theorise structure-agency dynamics and outcomes.

Combined, these methodological choices constitute a contribution beyond their function as research tools. RE research has tended toward single-site or descriptive approaches (Abebe, 2023) without theorising the mechanisms producing divergent outcomes. The comparative design addresses this by enabling analytical control across structurally similar yet outcome-divergent cases. The combination of SST with its CR underpinning, and the use of data structuring provides the theoretical underpinning to identify generative mechanisms beneath observable phenomena. Further, SST's inherent context-conduct bracketing separates institutional analysis from agentic response. This study is the first within RE research to adopt such a methodologically pluralistic design, thus integrating philosophical, theoretical, and analytical frameworks in service of a single coherent research strategy. This integration is not

incidental as it directly enables the thesis's core theoretical contributions of the enabling-constraining spectrum and the ES-IS weighting conception.

1.5. Key Contributions

This research makes theoretical and empirical contributions to entrepreneurship scholarship. Theoretically, contributions are threefold. First, it reframes institutional void debates (Heilbrunn, 2019; Mair and Marti, 2009) by demonstrating that voids function along an enabling-constraining spectrum depending on temporal, spatial-demographic, and regulatory configurations rather than possessing inherent enabling or constraining properties. Second, it posits the concept of shadow institutions as dual-functioning mechanisms that simultaneously erode formal structures and bridge individual agency into collective transformative capacity. Third, it extends SST (Stones, 2005) to CICs by showing that transformative capacity depends on specific external-internal structure (ES-IS) asymmetries (Kholeif and Jack, 2018), rather than from entrepreneurial activity in isolation.

Empirically, the research provides comparative insights into RE within camp settings, addressing geographic and methodological biases in existing scholarship (Abebe, 2023; Heilbrunn and Iannone, 2020; Lang et al., 2024). Methodologically, it demonstrates the analytical utility of careful theoretical sampling (Eisenhardt, 2021), combining retroduction (Bhaskar, 1989) and data structuring (Gioia, 2021) under the overarching frame of context-conduct analysis (Stones, 2005). For humanitarian policy, the findings challenge assumptions underlying camp design and refugee economic programming, demonstrating how comprehensive institutional control can inadvertently constrain economic autonomy by eliminating organic development processes through which transformative capacity emerges. The research highlights tensions between humanitarian control and refugee self-determination that require careful consideration, with implications for how institutional actors design camps, implement regulations, and support refugee economic integration.

Beyond entrepreneurship scholarship, the thesis speaks to wider interdisciplinary debates. Its engagement with agency-structure dynamics and informal social ordering contributes to sociological accounts of institutional reproduction and collective action (Giddens, 1984; Stones, 2005). For work and employment studies, the findings raise questions about livelihood construction and economic participation outside conventional employment relationships,

particularly where legal ambiguity precludes formal market integration. The enabling-constraining spectrum and shadow institutions concepts hold analytical purchase beyond refugee entrepreneurship, and warrant engagement from scholars across the social sciences.

1.6. Thesis Structure

Following this introduction chapter, the thesis proceeds through seven additional chapters. Chapter 2 reviews relevant literature across four domains: RE scholarship, constrained institutional entrepreneurship, entrepreneurial agency theory, and empirical applications of Structuration Theory (ST) scholarship, before presenting the theoretical framework for this study. Chapter 3 presents the empirical focus, detailing Jordan's refugee context and nominating the Zaatari and Azraq camps as the theoretical sample. Chapter 4 outlines the methodological framework including the philosophical foundations, research design, data collection methods, and analytical approach.

Chapters 5 and 6 present empirical findings through SST's methodological bracketing approach. Thus, Chapter 5 examines the frame of context: analysing institutional conditions along an enabling-constraining spectrum. Chapter 6 analyses the dimension of conduct: mapping refugee entrepreneurial responses along a transformative-reproductive continuum. Chapter 7 integrates these findings to address the aforementioned RQs, thereby developing theoretical contributions around the concepts of institutional voids, shadow institutions, and ES-IS asymmetries. Chapter 8 concludes by synthesising key findings, positioning theoretical contributions, reflecting on methodological considerations, and outlining implications for scholarship, policy, and future research directions. The following chapter begins this journey by reviewing current scholarship and identifying the theoretical space(s) this research occupies.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0. Introduction

The previous chapter presented the research problem, the subsequent research questions, described the theoretical and methodological approach, framed the key contributions, and presented the overall thesis outline. Building on this foundation, this chapter reviews the relevant bodies of entrepreneurship scholarship that situate the empirical focus of the study. The chapter analyses two interconnected bodies of literature (Figure 2) that collectively illuminate the landscape of entrepreneurial activity under conditions of forced displacement: refugee entrepreneurship and refugee camp entrepreneurship.

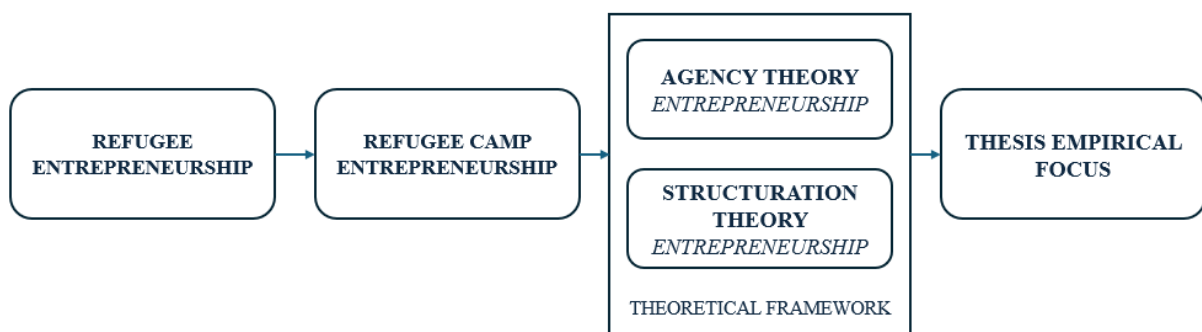


Figure 2: Literature review structure and theoretical positioning of the thesis

By synthesising these complementary bodies of literature, the chapter provides insights into how refugee entrepreneurs contend with institutional constraints while exercising human agency in their entrepreneurial pursuits. This integrative approach facilitates the identification of theoretical connections and patterns across these research domains, thus fostering a nuanced understanding of refugee camp entrepreneurship as a complex phenomenon. Additionally, this approach enables the identification of knowledge gaps that the subsequent theoretical framework (Chapter 3) and empirical analysis seek to address.

The first body of literature focuses specifically on refugee entrepreneurship, referring to entrepreneurial activities undertaken by individuals forced to leave their countries due to war or persecution (Lang et al., 2024). This review examines the predominant themes that distinguish refugee from immigrant entrepreneurship, analyses the geographic distribution of studies, critiques the methodological approaches, and maps the theoretical frameworks employed.

The second body of literature examines refugee camp entrepreneurship as a distinct subset of refugee entrepreneurship, highlighting how camp environments serve as social laboratories for observing entrepreneurial agency within severely constrained institutional contexts. This section analyses the specific structural, regulatory, and spatial conditions of camp settings and their implications for entrepreneurial action, and concludes by identifying the conceptual gaps that the study seeks to address. The theoretical frameworks through which these gaps are examined, including agency theory and Structuration Theory, are developed in Chapter 3, which constructs the analytical architecture underpinning the empirical analysis.

2.1. REFUGEE ENTREPRENEURSHIP: A REVIEW

Refugee entrepreneurship (RE) represents a growing field of academic scholarship that has gained significant traction in recent years in response to global displacement levels (Abebe, 2023). RE refers to business activities undertaken by individuals who have been forced to leave their country of origin due to war or persecution (Newman et al., 2024). While recent research (Heilbrunn and Iannone, 2020) identifies three distinct diaspora waves to RE scholarship (i.e. post-war refuge WWI & II), global south to global north migration, and within global south displacement), this literature review will focus on the latter two waves to maintain contemporary relevance to the discussion. Thus, this initial section will review the predominant themes within RE literature, analyse geographical contexts, appraise methodological approaches, and examine the applied theoretical frameworks that has shaped recent scholarship.

The second section examines refugee camp entrepreneurship (RCE), a distinct subset of this broader field that focuses specifically on entrepreneurial activities within constrained refugee camp settings, typically situated in Global South contexts. This sub framing provides an optimal lens for examining the interplay between structure and agency, as camp environments

function as social laboratories for observing how highly constrained structural conditions simultaneously enable and constrain entrepreneurial agency among displaced populations operating within severe resource limitations and regulatory restrictions.

2.1.1. Prevalent Themes

The main themes within RE scholarship can be summarised as being threefold: the differences between immigrant entrepreneurship and RE; the multilevel impact RE has on the surrogate or host nation state; and third, the institutional and agentic dimensions that shape RE within these host contexts.

2.1.1.1. Differences between Immigrant and Refugee Entrepreneurship

While all refugees are migrants, not all migrants are refugees, a fundamental distinction that profoundly shapes entrepreneurial experiences and outcomes (Abebe, 2023). By conceptualising RE as a separate field, academic opportunity is created for expanding scholarly debates regarding how extreme adversity and institutional constraints further influence entrepreneurial behaviour, resilience, and innovation (Lang et al., 2024). For RE specifically, this distinction gives rise to unique theoretical insights, as authors point out that taken-for-granted assumptions surrounding the homogeneity between refugee and nonrefugee immigrant entrepreneurs has ultimately led to the conceptual conflation of groups (Heilbrunn and Iannone, 2020). According to Abebe (2023) the main differences between these groups become manifest across three key dimensions: departure circumstances and legal status, resource access and network capabilities, and psychological barriers alongside distinct economic trajectories. Understanding these three areas of divergence is essential for recognising RE as a unique phenomenon requiring targeted analysis.

2.1.1.1.1. Departure Circumstances and Legal Status

Crawley and Skleparis (2018) highlight the ontological difference associated with the nature of each departure: economic migrants typically depart in a premeditated manner, selecting beneficial surrogate states for career prospectives, whereas refugees routinely vacate their countries of origin with minimal planning, often fleeing to neighbouring states under duress. They further point out that refugee journeys are seldom linear thus involve extended stays in transit countries (Crawley and Skleparis, 2018). This non-linear trajectory is further supported

by research showing how turbulent and fragmented journeys ultimately lead to refugees repeatedly needing to re-establish economic footholds in multiple locations rather than a straightforward migratory pattern (Collyer, 2010). These studies therefore challenge simple refugee/migrant taxonomies, illustrating how refugees' forced, unplanned departures fundamentally differ from economic migrants' strategic relocations. Such non-linear patterns are compounded by what Alkhaled and Sasaki (2022) term 'indeterminate liminality', a prolonged state of oscillating between identities and contexts, where refugees are required to reconcile identity reconstruction and temporal disorientation whilst simultaneously attempting to build sustainable livelihoods.

Using the specific example of refugee entrepreneurs, Refai and McElwee's (2023) paper accentuates the liminal stages that are often associated with informal or survival-based business activities. The authors posit the term 'subentrepreneurship', referring to various forms of self-employment that are undeclared to relevant authorities as refugees attempt to escape superimposed historical, temporal, spatial, institutional and social constraints. This concept highlights how refugees engage in entrepreneurial pursuits differently from their migrant counterparts, particularly when facing uncertain asylum procedures that force them into informal economic activities. For instance, protracted asylum procedures severely restrict refugees' economic agency in host communities, creating unique constraints that defer entrepreneurship activity including legal restrictions, limited mobility, and uncertain residency status (Bizri, 2017). Such constraints trap vulnerable refugees in a state of liminal integration, where entrepreneurship routinely becomes a low-capital experience that reinforces isolation and marginalisation (Refai et al., 2024).

This concept of liminal integration finds theoretical support in Harima and Plak's (2025) recent study on RCE. Their study on the Umkulu camp in Eritrea demonstrates how refugee entrepreneurs must adapt their sensemaking processes to manage the tension between temporary status and indefinite duration. Central to their framing is the notion that refugees engage in complex temporal negotiations to remedy this conflict. Thus, rather than accepting their present circumstances, refugees actively recompose conflicting memories from their past, while simultaneously reclaiming their existence in the present, through entrepreneurship activity. In essence, Harima and Plak (2025) illustrate how refugees reposition tradition, a process that allows them to maintain cultural identity while pragmatically adapting to camp constraints. This interplay between past, present, and cultural continuity shows

entrepreneurship not simply as economic activity, but as a form of an existential pathway. This theoretical nuance helps explain why RE often becomes caught within survival-oriented activities that fail to generate transformative outcomes (Refai et al, 2024).

In Jordan, displaced women entrepreneurs circumvent institutional barriers through defiant practices and hidden activities while simultaneously confronting financial difficulties, cultural differences, and skills gaps that channel them toward necessity-based ventures (Al-Dajani et al., 2019; Zighan, 2021). These compounding constraints create fundamental disparities between refugee and economic migrant entrepreneurs, with the uncertainty of residency status, not knowing how long they will remain in host countries, thus representing perhaps the most significant obstacle to sustainable livelihood development in host nations.

2.1.1.1.2. Resource Access and Network Capabilities

The disparity in resource mobilisation capabilities between groups evidently stems from the circumstances that forced displacement creates. While migrant entrepreneurs have been shown to effectively reconnect to their homeland through established networking capabilities with relative ease (Gold, 2014), refugees face what Bizri (2017) describe as compromised asset remobilisation coupled with disrupted network capabilities. Harima's (2022) theoretical framework of embeddedness and dis-embeddedness provides some insight into this divergence. Forced displacement routinely severs refugees' connections to their home countries, thus resulting in temporary resource loss but also extending to their relational capital (Harima, 2022). In contrast, economic migrants maintain more continuous access to homeland networks through less disruptive migration processes, thereby preserving ties that enable resource mobilisation (Drori et al., 2009). This distinction supports why RE often emerges from positions of greater structural disadvantage than economic migrant entrepreneurship.

In support of this enhanced networking capability, Williams et al. (2022) find that migrant entrepreneurs, specifically dual nationals, were able to benefit from dual resource capabilities through having transnational mobility. The authors reported that 23 out of 34 study participants were able to maintain dual business operations across borders. However, these capabilities largely remain unavailable for many refugee entrepreneurs, particularly those confined by asylum restrictions.

Thus, the constraints associated with the refugee status create significant barriers to building equivalent business networks compared to voluntary migrants. Limitations to mobility, employment rights, and financial inclusion further compound these challenges. Scholars recognise that refugee entrepreneurs must often develop alternative resource acquisition strategies, including leveraging diaspora communities and humanitarian aid networks (Betts et al., 2017). Despite such constraints, evidence suggests that when granted appropriate legal status and support, refugees can gradually develop transnational flexibility, though the process typically requires more time and external assistance than for voluntary migrants engaging in similar entrepreneurial activities (Crush and McCordic, 2017).

2.1.1.1.3. Psychological Barriers and Economic Trajectories

Even after obtaining work permits or citizenship, refugee entrepreneurs frequently remain focused on basic reestablishment phases while voluntary migrants experience more uninterrupted economic progression (Crush and McCordic, 2017). The psychological and emotional dimensions of these divergent trajectories further accentuate disparities between migrant categories. Research in Belgium, for instance, identifies refugee trauma, thus traumatic displacement events that negatively impact entrepreneurial pursuits in host contexts, as a distinctive constraint absent from voluntary migration experiences (Wauters and Lambrecht, 2008). This trauma manifests in several ways, including diminished risk tolerance, heightened anxiety during business negotiations, and persistent fear of future displacement that inhibits long-term business planning and capital investment (Ritchie, 2018).

Additionally, many refugee entrepreneurs report struggling with concentration and decision-making processes critical to business management (Williams and Krasniqi, 2018). These mental health challenges, including psychological trauma, are further supported by Mawson and Kasem (2019) who document how refugee journey experiences create negative health consequences. Invariably, these mental health challenges create additional barriers to the more established individual-level barriers such as weak language proficiency, limited cultural awareness and poor financial literacy already established in literature (Wauters and Lambrecht, 2008), thus widening the gap between refugee and voluntary migrant populations.

In sum, the disparity between refugee and migrant entrepreneurship not only shapes individual business trajectories but also influences how their entrepreneurial activities ultimately impact

the socioeconomic fabric within their respective host communities. The unique challenges faced by refugee entrepreneurs, be they from legal restrictions or psychological trauma, create distinct patterns of economic development that, when properly supported, can contribute to the local economies within these host communities.

2.1.1.2. Impact of Refugee Entrepreneurship on Host Societies

The impact of RE on host societies can be segmented through multilevel analysis incorporating individual-level (*micro*), community-level (*meso*) and regional/national-level (*macro*) scholarship. Understanding these perspectives proves particularly pertinent given policy debates surrounding refugee integration, economic participation, and resource allocation in host nations.

2.1.1.2.1. Micro-level

At the individual-level, contemporary research accentuates how RE serves multifaceted functions beyond mere economic necessity. The frame of self-actualisation shows that engagement in entrepreneurship amongst refugees operates as a means for identity rebuilding and psychological wellbeing following displacement (Sabar and Posner, 2013; van Kooy, 2016). This dimension proves particularly pertinent for refugees whose forced displacement has disconnected them from professional identities. According to relevant research, entrepreneurial activity consistently emerges across contexts as a tool for reclaiming agency and constructing viable identities, providing not just income but also purpose and meaning following displacement (Fong et al., 2007).

The structural dimension of individual-level entrepreneurship also centres on how refugees turn to self-employment to circumvent discriminatory employment systems. Recent studies contextualise how entrepreneurial pursuits can empower refugees to evade structural barriers associated within conventional employment, with scholars detailing how individual-level start-ups enable refugees to bypass such discrimination practices. Sepulveda et al.'s (2011) research exemplifies this motivational behaviour, demonstrating how refugee entrepreneurs routinely evade blocked mobility in host nation labour markets through self-employment pathways.

The relationship between entrepreneurial motivation and institutional context however proves more complex than the notion of blocked mobility suggests. Mousa's (2024) study of Syrian

entrepreneurs in Egypt illustrates how multiple and intersecting needs can drive RE propensity. Mousa (2024) reports that inadequate food provision by host institutions, lack of access to hygiene products, absence of recreational activities, and the need for psychological wellbeing being a key driver to RE propensity in host nation contexts.

The gendered dimensions of individual-level RE prove pertinent in contexts where women assume new familial responsibilities following displacement. Alkhaled's (2019) case study of a Syrian woman entrepreneur in Jordan exemplifies how forced migration can catalyse entrepreneurial agency owing to survival instincts. The longitudinal case illustrates how RE at the individual and family level functions as both economic necessity and a psychological coping mechanism. This connects to broader patterns identified by Al-Dajani et al. (2019) in their study of displaced women entrepreneurs in Jordan, who resort to defiant practices and hidden activities to circumvent institutional barriers. Together, these studies show how entrepreneurial outcomes for refugee women remain constrained by institutional barriers, thus limiting growth potential and channelling ventures toward survival-oriented activities. This gendered perspective highlights how RE operates at the intersection of structural disadvantage and agentic resistance at the individual level.

The psychological dimensions of RE appear particularly pronounced in extreme environments, where entrepreneurship serves multiple functions beyond economic necessity. Research across diverse CICs: Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon and African detention facilities in Israel, show how entrepreneurial activities enhance individual resilience, provide sense-making mechanisms, and enable survival under institutional hostility (Heilbrunn, 2019; Shepherd et al., 2020). These studies demonstrate a common pattern in that refugees persistently pursue entrepreneurial activities despite hostile institutional environments, with camp-based ventures serving as foundational experiences for later business development beyond encampment. The repeated reconstruction of pop-up market stalls following government demolitions, documented by Heilbrunn (2019), embodies this resilience while simultaneously demonstrating the constraining effects of host nation policies. This pattern suggests that at the individual-level, RE operates dialectically, as both an expression of agentic resilience and a manifestation of structural constraint.

Overall, the micro-level body of literature suggests that RE can generate empowering effects at the individual-level, thus providing purpose. However, it is clear that many individual-level impacts remain embedded within and constrained by meso and macro-level institutional

arrangements that evidently shape what forms of entrepreneurship prove possible for refugee entrepreneurs.

2.1.1.2.2. Meso-level

At the community or collective level, the theme of integration is an established focus within extant scholarship (Wauters and Lambrecht, 2008). The formation of refugee communities typically leads to the creation of economic hubs within host communities, thus serving as an integral community service for many peripheral refugees struggling to integrate and find employment within traditional labour markets (Wauters and Lambrecht, 2008). Paradoxically, however, this concentration of entrepreneurial activity within dense enclaves can ostensibly compound integration challenges by reinforcing social boundaries, thus limiting interactions with the broader society, thereby creating economic dependencies that discourage refugees from developing wider networks and skills necessary for fuller socioeconomic participation outside these ethnic economies.

The relationship between RE and host society integration however remains contested, with scholarship revealing tensions between bridging and enclave effects. While entrepreneurship can facilitate sociocultural, economic, and psychological integration dimensions, potentially serving as mechanisms connecting refugee and indigenous communities (Louise and Jiang, 2018), the conditions enabling such bridging prove more complex. Research on integration initiatives in the Netherlands demonstrates how direct contact mechanisms, such as 'rooming with a local', can facilitate employment and social connections (van Dijk et al., 2022). However, more recent evidence posits unintended consequences such as community fragmentation over resource scarcity, identity conflicts between repatriation and integration aspirations, and passivity stemming from prolonged uncertainty (van der Giessen et al., 2025). This tension suggests that RE integrative potential thus depends on institutional support structures and resource availability. These findings suggest how meso-level integration outcomes typically emerge from the interaction between refugee entrepreneurial agency and host society institutional responses, rather than entrepreneurship promoting either integration or enclave effects.

Recent scholarship posits an interesting local multiplier effect concerning RE in the case of Lebanon (Harb et al., 2019). The paper counteracts the populist view by right wing

commentators that refugees are economic burdens to host nations through showcasing the positive contributions by Syrian refugee entrepreneurs in Beirut. Thus, rather than confirming popular perceptions that refugee businesses typically compete with native businesses, the study suggests a complementary dimension to the theme of integration thus leading to the spatial development of urban spaces. However, van der Giessen et al.'s (2025) study of Ukrainian refugees in the Netherlands shows how integration initiatives can paradoxically deepen community fragmentation, and intensify identity conflicts, showing that meso-level interventions require careful design to enable refugees to become agents of change.

Extending the theme of the spatial dimension, recent scholarship demonstrates how refugee camps evolve from emergency shelters into complex urban environments, challenging their designation as temporary spaces (Alshoubaki, 2017). This aggregate transformation occurs through demographic growth, physical infrastructure development, and economic activity as refugees establish businesses and market systems. The Dadaab camp in Kenya and Zaatari camp in Jordan fittingly epitomise this evolution. Dadaab was once considered the largest refugee camp in the world by the UNHCR, while Zaatari informally gained city status in Jordan (Weston, 2015). Despite their nominal temporary status, both have functioned as urban settlements for decades.

The emergence of distinct camp economies in displacement contexts further illustrates this spatial evolution. Werker's (2007) model, developed through observations of Uganda's Kyangwali refugee settlement, demonstrates how entrepreneurial activity generates internal markets, employment structures, and economic circulation patterns comparable to urban informal economies. However, the vibrancy of these intricate economies appear to operate within the milieu of institutional contradictions. Evidently, temporary settlements lack the formal frameworks necessary for sustainable entrepreneurship to occur, thereby leading to property rights becoming ambiguous, business registration systems being fraught, and refugees unable to access formal financial services (Werker, 2007). This institutional void compels many refugee entrepreneurs to develop alternative economic systems while encamped, primarily through social networks and informal capital-sharing arrangements that substitute for such absent formal structures (Omeje and Mwangi, 2014).

In sum, entrepreneurs in protracted camp settings appear to be confronted by a myriad of contradictory pressures. Consequently, this tension produces a pattern wherein camp-based

entrepreneurship appears to gravitate toward lower-capital, no-frill business models that clearly limit growth potential and thus reinforce survival-oriented rather than transformative economic outcomes (Refai et al., 2024).

2.1.1.2.3. Macro-level

At the regional and national level, research challenges the traditional humanitarian lens by demonstrating how policy frameworks can ultimately shape whether refugees function as economic contributors or remain dependent on humanitarian largesse. This invariably represents a shift from care-based interventions towards market-oriented governance that recognises refugees' potential as economic contributors to the surrogate state in question (Ilcan and Rygiel, 2015). Policies such as deregulation, have proved particularly pronounced in middle-income host countries that host substantial refugee populations as in the case of Turkey (Gürsel, 2017). Using the example of policy relaxation on foreign business ownership in Turkey, Gürsel reports Syrian-owned enterprises expanded exponentially to over 15,000 registered companies between 2012 – 2014, creating employment opportunities, introducing new products to Turkish markets, and establishing overseas trade channels. This therefore illustrates how removing regulatory barriers enables can refugees to transition from initial aid recipients to economic actors for the host nation.

However, deregulation alone proves inadequate without complementary economic support by various regional actors. Strategic compacts, described as partnerships integrating governments, international organisations, and private sector actors, have been shown to inadvertently amplify RE impact in some host nations (Betts et al., 2017). Betts et al.'s analysis of Kenya and Jordan demonstrated that local job compacts created formal employment opportunities for many encamped refugees in Dadaab and Zaatari respectively, thereby generating significant multiplier effects for camp-based entrepreneurs. Customarily, as externally employed refugees increased their spending power, RCEs experienced improved cash flow, particularly as repatriation reduced internal competition while maintaining market demand. The logic underlying these multiplier effects receives further empirical support from Alloush et al.'s (2017) study of Congolese refugee camps in Rwanda. Their study showed that cash-based assistance generated greater internal economic activity than in-kind aid, with spillover effects benefiting both refugee and host community businesses further leading to enhanced community integration.

National support programs across OECD countries show effective intervention strategies for RE development (OECD, 2019). For instance, Italian initiatives integrating training, access to finance, and business coaching, report 85% business survival at the 24-month interval. The Italian World-Dedalo Project illustrates successful credit guarantee integration with advisory services, while similar development initiatives in the US have provided 24,000 refugees with microloans between 1991-2015. Importantly, entrepreneurship support generates significant non-financial integration benefits even for non-launchers, such as improved language proficiency, expanded networking capabilities, increased self-confidence, and enhanced employability rates (OECD, 2019).

Beyond these program-level initiatives, macro-economic analyses potentially show substantial fiscal returns from enabling RE in host nations. Refugee Action's (2022) economic appraisal estimates that lifting the UK's asylum seeker employment ban could generate approximately £300 million in tax revenue and administrative savings. Furthermore, the case of Australia concretely demonstrates longer-term contributions to the treasury when refugees are granted access to business ownership rights (Hugo, 2013). Hugo's longitudinal study reports refugees often achieve high business ownership rates, customarily leading to transnational connections between Australia and origin countries, thereby generating remittance flows further leading to local multiplier effects benefiting host communities.

Overall, macro-level research reframes refugee populations from economic burdens to potential economic assets. Progressive policies such as deregulation appear capable of transforming refugee-host relationships by creating conditions wherein refugees' entrepreneurial capabilities and transnational networks can generate economic value for host societies. However, this macro-level body remains underdeveloped relative to micro-level studies in both refugee and broader migrant entrepreneurship scholarship (Kašperová et al., 2022). Sizeable gaps persist in understanding how different policy configurations interact with varying refugee populations, host economy structures, and settlement-specific institutional configurations, where even ostensibly similar camp environments can produce divergent entrepreneurial outcomes.

2.1.1.3. Factors Influencing Refugee Entrepreneurship in Host Economies

All entrepreneurship activities ordinarily take place within complex social structures that vary significantly for displaced populations. Existing RE scholarship, therefore, occupies a critical

nexus where institutional structures meet human determination often under extreme circumstances. Within the structural dimension, scholarship has examined the relationship between institutional structures and entrepreneurial action from multiple angles, thereby revealing a more context-dependent picture. Institutional structures can simultaneously impose regulatory burdens, limit resource access, and reproduce social exclusion, while also providing frameworks for market participation, network formation, and pathways to economic integration (Welter, 2011). This complexity becomes particularly pronounced when examining institutional voids, where the absence or weakness of formal structures generates conditions that resist straightforward categorisation. Mair and Martí (2009) demonstrate how voids produce uncertainty and resource limitations that constrain entrepreneurial activity, while de la Chaux and Haugh (2020) show how the reduction of formal barriers can create spaces for informal economic organisation. Importantly, neither position claims that voids are inherently one or the other, thus rather, both studies point toward the role of contextual factors in determining how voids are experienced by entrepreneurs. This contingent understanding of institutional voids, as producing outcomes that vary along a spectrum rather than resolving into binary poles, provides an important foundation for the analytical framework developed in this thesis.

The concept of institutional voids thus provides a pertinent lens for understanding RE, as these contexts, particularly those within the Global South are often characterised by weak or absent formal institutions. To understand how refugee entrepreneurs operate within these complex institutional landscapes, this review adopts both top-down and bottom-up analytical approaches. The top-down perspective examines how structural conditions, such as institutional voids can shape entrepreneurial possibilities, while the bottom-up approach explores how refugees exercise agency and respond creatively to these institutional constraints and opportunities.

The subsequent section first frames the constraining nature of institutional structures before discussing the juxtaposed enablement thesis. Next, the review then looks at the specific role of institutional voids within entrepreneurship scholarship, with a particular emphasis on the paralleled and competing perspectives of constraint and enablement. Thereafter, the bottom up or agentic dimension is explored to complete the analytical framework.

2.1.1.3.1. The Constraining Nature of Institutional Structures

Analysing the constraining impact of institutional structures on an individual-level, Omeje and Mwangi (2014) examined how systemic barriers in Nairobi, Kenya, create formidable challenges for Somali refugee entrepreneurs. Their research reveals how language requirements function as exclusionary mechanisms, forcing refugee entrepreneurs into dependency on community intermediaries or restricting them to co-ethnic markets despite their entrepreneurial capabilities. While refugees demonstrate remarkable adaptability by forming strategic partnerships and activating transnational networks, these responses represent necessary adaptations to hostile institutional environments rather than optimal business strategies.

Similarly, Barak-Bianco and Raijman (2015) illustrate how Israel's complex regulatory framework systematically disadvantages asylum-seeking entrepreneurs through opaque business regulations and licensing requirements that privilege those with prior knowledge of local systems. The institutional failure to provide adequate guidance, information access, or support structures effectively marginalises refugee entrepreneurs regardless of their business acumen. Building on this constraint, Meyer and Pilkova (2017) further demonstrate how market structures and information asymmetries in host countries create significant barriers to market entry. Their research highlights how institutional gatekeeping of market knowledge effectively blocks refugee entrepreneurs from identifying viable opportunities, not through lack of entrepreneurial vision, but through systemically restricted access to critical information networks and resources that local entrepreneurs take for granted. These studies collectively demonstrate how institutional structures, rather than individual-level deficiencies per se, create the primary constraints on RE.

Research reveals how social exclusion and xenophobia create structural barriers for refugee entrepreneurs in host nations. Refai et al. (2018) document how societal discrimination against Syrian refugees in Jordan routinely limits entrepreneurs' ability to operate outside ethnic enclaves, forcing them to primarily serve co-ethnic communities rather than mainstream markets. Turner (2020) provides an interesting nuance to the notion of race and xenophobia in his ethnographic analysis of Syrian refugees in Jordan's Zaatari camp. The research suggests that the humanitarian sector's designation of Syrian refugees as 'entrepreneurs' functions as a form of colonial racial positioning that distinguishes them from their 'African' counterparts

(Turner, 2020). This institutional categorisation constrains refugee agency by forcing refugees into predetermined economic roles based on their ethnicity. Turner's paper illustrates how such institutional labels, whilst masquerading as a form of enablement, function as structural constraints that limit refugees' capacity to define their own economic pathways.

Koburtay et al. (2020) complement this by demonstrating how cultural pressures and group favouritism create multi-layered exclusion practices that reshape Syrian refugees' professional identity, showing that economic and legal restrictions serve as important promoters of cultural exclusion despite strong cultural similarities between Syrian refugees and Jordanian hosts. This marginalisation not only restricts market reach but also significantly impacts refugees' capacity to secure financing, develop business networks beyond their immediate community, and establish sustainable enterprises with growth potential.

Similarly, Wauters and Lambrecht (2008) analyse how community-level barriers often result in refugee entrepreneurs becoming shoehorned within ethnic economic enclaves that paradoxically impede their broader integration. Their research in Belgium demonstrates that while these ethnic enclaves initially provide refugee entrepreneurs with accessible markets and cultural comfort, they ultimately restrict business growth by limiting entrepreneurs to markets with excess supply, low profitability margins, and minimal expansion opportunities. This structural constraint creates a self-reinforcing cycle where refugees' economic activities become increasingly segregated from mainstream markets, reinforcing their social isolation and potentially exacerbating rather than alleviating integration challenges.

Furthermore, Klaesson and Öner (2020) utilise ethnic enclave theory to analyse how residential segregation and concentration at local market levels determine immigrant employment and entrepreneurship outcomes. Their study produced mixed results across different immigrant groups, though segregation consistently showed as insignificant to labour market outcomes. While Klaesson and Öner acknowledge self-employment as an outcome, this agency remains largely implicit within their structural framework. Their positioning of refugees as constrained contrasts with evidence showing how displaced populations strategically utilise ethnic concentration for resource mobilisation and market development (Villares-Varela et al., 2022). Consequently, their work contributes to understanding geographic structures as systematically constraining entrepreneurial opportunities yet neglects the recursive relationship between

spatial arrangements and entrepreneurial agency documented in structuration-informed scholarship (Welter, 2011).

Macro-level institutional barriers create systematic disadvantages for refugee entrepreneurs that operate independently of their actual capabilities. Wauters and Lambrecht (2008) demonstrate how some host countries purposefully devalue foreign credentials while imposing restrictive legal status requirements, forcing highly skilled refugees into underemployment during prolonged asylum processing. Van Dijk et al.'s (2022) study similarly illustrates how traditional governmental structures in the Netherlands routinely fail to recognise refugee qualifications and capabilities, necessitating social innovations to circumvent these institutional barriers. This institutional constraint appears to spillover at the meso-level, where Harb et al.'s (2019) study of Syrian entrepreneurs in Lebanon shows how such regulation forces ostensibly lead refugees into the take-up of informal economic activities. However, recent policy developments present a contrasting approach. The EU's Temporary Protection Directive for Ukrainian refugees, which granted immediate work rights and simplified credential recognition (van der Giessen et al., 2025), represents a marked departure from these restrictive frameworks. This selective application, however, potentially exposes racialised dimensions of refugee policy. Turner's (2020) comparative analysis of Syrian and African refugees documents institutional favouritism whereby host nations extend differential recognition based on refugee origin rather than qualifications. Thus, the juxtaposition between immediate credential recognition for Ukrainian refugees and systematic devaluation faced by refugees from countries belonging to the Global South, tacitly suggests that these barriers function as racialised gatekeeping mechanisms.

Further research examines how systematic barriers to housing and education often compound the challenges associated with RE in deprived urban areas (Lyon et al., 2007). Their research described how residential instability, often resulting from discrimination, sub-standard accommodation, and limited financial resources, disrupts both business development efforts and mental wellbeing. The authors document how these structural constraints combine with experiences of discrimination to create patterns of blocked mobility that damage refugees' confidence and psychological health over time, effectively erecting multiple barriers that limit entrepreneurial potential regardless of individual capabilities or motivation. These cumulative events lead to growing disadvantages that affect both economic integration and personal wellbeing, highlighting the interconnected nature of structural barriers in RE.

At the macro-institutional level, institutional voids have been shown to be a hindrance to entrepreneurial opportunities. Khanna and Palepu's (1997) foundational work demonstrates how such voids, defined as absent or inefficient market-supporting structures, hinder entrepreneurial possibilities by reducing market access and increasing business costs, thereby forcing individuals to develop inefficient workarounds to compensate for these constraints. Research in Bangladesh demonstrates how these voids create disruptions encompassing constrained resource availability, heightened uncertainty, and reduced access to established networks and support systems (Mair and Marti, 2009). The constraining effects of institutional voids prove particularly pronounced in less developed countries, where entrepreneurs often become channelled into necessity-based ventures (Khoury and Prasad, 2016).

The constraining effects of institutional voids are further supported by more recent conceptual works (Webb et al., 2020), in which it is argued that concurrent institutional voids, referring to both formal and informal voids, create systematic barriers to entrepreneurship, thereby limiting the range of available opportunities. When such voids become severe, however, Manolova et al. (2008) assert that the notion of 'institutional escapism' seemingly becomes the most plausible agentic response, wherein exit or avoidance is the default position as opposed to confronting the structure. This escapism perspective thus indicates that institutional voids create substantial barriers that lead entrepreneurs to seeking alternative contexts rather than to remain and challenge such compromised environments. This reinforces the constraining thesis by positioning institutional voids as fundamentally problematic structural conditions which reduce entrepreneurial possibilities, making the act of withdrawal a plausible response to such institutional deficiencies.

It should be noted however, that empirical work in the field of RE which examines the constraining effects of institutional voids remains limited, with most studies in this perspective either being conceptual or focusing on general entrepreneurship in emerging markets rather than the specific context of forced migration.

2.1.1.3.2. The Enabling Nature of Institutional Structures

Moving beyond constraints, institutional structures demonstrate considerable potential to enable RE when trust mechanisms and supportive policies align. Research in Turkey shows

how institutional trust, defined as confidence in host nation governance, legal systems, and support structures, fosters entrepreneurial activity that benefits both refugee and host communities (Baktir and Watson, 2020). This trust operates bidirectionally, thus supportive monetary policies such as grants and microfinance initiatives not only facilitate business creation but also build mutual trust between refugees and hosts, particularly when combined with entrepreneurship education programs delivered by charitable stakeholders (Idris, 2019). Together, these studies suggest that institutional enablement functions through reinforcing mechanisms whereby policy support generates trust, which in turn encourages entrepreneurial engagement, creating conditions where refugees can thrive economically while fostering social integration. This contrasts sharply with the constraining void perspective, suggesting that institutional presence, when structured appropriately, enables rather than hinders RE.

The longitudinal perspective on enabling institutional structures is provided by Tavakoli (2020) paper on Sahrawi refugees in Algeria's Tindouf camps. The study demonstrates how policy changes can create enabling environments for refugee economic activities over extended periods. Tavakoli documents how shifts in humanitarian policies affected income-generating activities and cultural production. The study concluded that institutional modifications such as restrictions on certain traditional practices, eventually enabled new forms of cultural entrepreneurship to emerge as refugees adapted their heritage skills to meet changing policy frameworks.

In relation to educational programs, Harima et al. (2021) document how German business incubators alleviate refugee 'foreignness' by identifying five functional domains specific to RE support. These included the dissemination of structured entrepreneurial knowledge, mitigating apprehension surrounding new and different institutional environments, providing motivating strategies to participants, approaches to leverage social capital within the host country, and providing soft support concerning personal matters. While such research predominately focuses on Global North examples, Nayak et al. (2019) similarly document how vocational initiatives by charitable organisations enhance entrepreneurial capabilities among Tibetan refugees in India. Their study examined how structured vocational programs build essential skills that can create pathways for sustainable livelihood development among displaced populations, demonstrating that organised training interventions significantly improve refugee entrepreneurs' capacity to create viable businesses. Moreover, the study also concluded that social networks can be developed through institutional led training initiatives.

In juxtaposition to organised interventions by institutional actors, Heilbrunn (2019) documents how institutional misalignment can enable entrepreneurial activity, thus suggesting institutional voids become a precursor to RE within constrained contexts. Studying entrepreneurial activity in and around an Israeli detention camp, the research exhibited the utility of bricolage entrepreneurship helped alleviate institutional barriers to RE. Thus, rather than viewing institutional voids as inherently constraining (Mair and Marti, 2009), the study suggests that gaps in formal structures can create space for entrepreneurial activities and community cohesion to take place. Moreover, de la Chaux and Haugh (2020) further contribute to the institutional void and bricolage literature in their recent study on RCE. The co-authors examined how RCE in the Dadaab refugee camp in Kenya, likewise, helped refugee entrepreneurs to alleviate institutional barriers within a CIC. The study documents how refugee entrepreneurs erode formal institutions, recombine conducive aspects of both formal and informal institutions, and exploit the advantages of institutional misalignment through bricolage strategies. In particular, the study found that refugee entrepreneurs would strategically maintain rather than overcome institutional misalignment for venture creation, thus leading to dignity preservation by exhibiting reduced aid dependency.

Williams et al. (2022) similarly posit that institutional voids can function as an enabling force to entrepreneurial activity. Their study demonstrates that forced migrants deliberately avoided government-connected formal networks in their country of origin due to corruption concerns, thus mobilising trusted social connections who could help hedge local complexities. The study further demonstrates that such voids shaped entrepreneurial objectives toward non-monetary outcomes such as creating jobs for extended family members, supporting ethnic communities, and addressing youth unemployment rather than mere profit maximisation. This enabling perspective is further supported by Tracey et al. (2011), who demonstrate how entrepreneurs bridge institutional voids by creating new organisational forms that fill gaps in the institutional environment, showing how voids provide opportunities for institutional innovation and market creation.

2.1.1.3.3. Overview of Institutional Voids: Constraining or Enabling

The concept of institutional voids has generated contemporary scholarly debate regarding their impact on entrepreneurship. Overall, the scholarship on institutional voids can be divided into

two competing schools of thought; one view that characterises institutional voids as constraints that hinder market interactions, thereby creating operational challenges for entrepreneurs, while an opposing perspective recognises their potential as enablers that can create opportunity spaces for entrepreneurial activity. Table 1 (page 49) provides an abridged overview of these two competing perspectives. This divide thus reflects fundamentally different assumptions about how entrepreneurs respond to institutional deficiencies: whether they are primarily hindered by structural gaps or whether these same gaps create opportunities for innovative entrepreneurial action.

The literature has identified informal networks as substitutes for formal institutions (Williams et al., 2022), yet the systematic nature, operational mechanisms, and sustainability of these substitutive arrangements remain largely underexplored to date. Furthermore, significant questions remain about what precisely fills these structural gaps and under what conditions institutional voids function as constraints versus opportunities. Current research offers limited insight into the hidden organisational forms and institutional structures that become actualised in constrained refugee contexts to support entrepreneurial activity (Abebe, 2023; Lang et al., 2024). Understanding these evasive structures, namely how they form, evolve, and compare across different refugee settings within the same host nation (such as between camps or between camp and urban refugee communities), represents a theoretical nuance to RE scholarship and may reveal important implications for institutional and agentic adaptation in precarious contexts.

Institutional Voids as Constraining		Institutional Voids as Enabling	
Author(s)	Key Findings	Author(s)	Key Findings
Mair and Marti (2009)	Institutional voids lead to organisational disruption, constrained resource availability, reduced access to established norms and support systems, inhibited growth opportunities, and increased vulnerability	Heilbrunn (2019)	Institutional misalignment can enable entrepreneurial activity, suggesting institutional voids become a precursor to RE within constrained contexts through bricolage strategies
Khanna and Palepu (1997)	Institutional voids constrain business activities thus requiring firms to act strategically to compensate for these constraints	de la Chaux and Haugh (2020)	Refugee entrepreneurs can erode formal institutions, recombine conducive aspects of both formal and informal institutions, and exploit the advantages of institutional misalignment through bricolage strategies in Dadaab refugee camp, Kenya
Khoury and Prasad (2016)	Concurrent institutional constraints (formal/informal voids) within less developed countries acutely challenge local entrepreneurs, thus requiring survival-based strategies such as bricolage entrepreneurship	Williams et al (2022)	Forced migrants deliberately avoid formal networks (i.e. actively seek voids) due to corruption concerns, mobilising trusted social connections to hedge local complexities and shape entrepreneurial objectives toward non-monetary outcomes
Webb et al (2020)	Formal and informal institutional voids readily limit the range of available opportunities and create barriers to entrepreneurship entry	Sydow et al (2022)	Where voids are considered enabling, entrepreneurs work around institutional voids and proactively cross-brace the institutional infrastructure around them to achieve their entrepreneurial goals
Manolova et al (2008)	Barriers and voids in institutions lead to the limiting in range of available entrepreneurial opportunities	Tracey et al (2011)	Institutional entrepreneurs bridge voids by creating new organisational forms that fill such gaps in the environment, thereby illustrating how voids provide opportunities for institutional innovation and market creation

Table 1: Two competing schools of thought on the role of institutional voids on entrepreneurship – with supporting scholarship

2.1.1.3.4. Agentic Dimension in Refugee Entrepreneurship

The agentic dimension or internalised frame of agency refers to the agent's capacity to act purposefully and exercise choice within their social environment (Stones, 2005). For refugee entrepreneurs, agency manifests in their ability to identify opportunities, mobilise resources in spite of limitations, to create businesses or entrepreneurial openings in resource-stricken environments such as refugee camps. Adopting a bottom-up perspective therefore means examining how individual refugees interpret and respond to such institutional constraints and opportunities based on their lived experiences, and their future actions. This agentic lens is particularly pertinent to constrained entrepreneurship scholarship because it illustrates how agents actively work within, around, or against institutional barriers to pursue entrepreneurial activities. Thus, rather than being simply constrained by structures, refugee entrepreneurs have been shown to actualise transformative agency by finding ways to overcome such limitations, thereby illustrating that constraint and agency exist in dynamic tension. The following sections provide scholarly examples of this agentic dimension in practice.

Prominent research introduces the concept of mixed embeddedness to explain how immigrant entrepreneurs actively perceive and create opportunities within host economies (Kloosterman et al., 1999). The authors demonstrate that entrepreneurs are not passive recipients of market structures but rather agents who actively function within their new economic landscapes through their socio-cultural networks. This theoretical framework shows how immigrant entrepreneurs exercise agency by leveraging their social capital to identify market openings that others might miss, while simultaneously adapting to institutional constraints. By highlighting how entrepreneurs actively interpret and respond to structural conditions through their distinct social embeddedness, the authors relate the ways immigrants transform institutional barriers into entrepreneurial possibilities through their own initiative and resourcefulness.

The mixed embeddedness framework (Kloosterman et al., 1999) demonstrates what Refai et al. (2025) identify as the interplay between contexts as environments and contexts that are constructed by the agent. Refugee entrepreneurs do not simply respond to opportunity structures per se; they actively construct contexts through their social embeddedness and strategic networking capabilities (Ram et al., 2017). Yet, as Refai et al. (2025) remark, the notion of embeddedness has historically accentuated external constraints over the concept of

agentic capacity. Expanding on Kloosterman et al.'s (1999) thesis, recent research describes how refugee entrepreneurs actively engage with opportunity structures through varying approaches. Omorede and Axelsson (2018) identified multiple strategic approaches that refugee entrepreneurs use at different stages of venture creation. Their research illustrates that during early phases; entrepreneurs often employ opportunity 'scanning' strategies where they would systematically analyse market gaps in ethnic enclaves before expanding their focus. As they progress, some refugee entrepreneurs would shift to 'network activation', meaning they would cultivate both ethnic ties for initial support and weak cross-cultural ties for market expansion. As their operations matured, some would develop institutional 'bridging' techniques, whereby they connect with formal support structures while maintaining informal community networks. This hybrid approach allowed them to access capital, legal expertise, and professional services from established organisations, while preserving community networks.

Temporal shifts across various venture stages exemplify what Emirbayer and Mische (1998) describe as the temporal dimensions of agency, iteration (drawing on the past), practical evaluation (assessing the present), and projectivity (imagining future potential and outcomes all play a significant role in the actualisation of agency. This temporal perspective therefore challenges static views of refugee entrepreneurs as constrained, showing instead how they actively reconfigure their engagement with structures over time (Refai et al., 2025).

This reconfiguration operates across multiple dimensions of embeddedness. Scholarship distinguishes between 'concrete embeddedness' (i.e. social networks) and 'abstract embeddedness' (i.e. politico-institutional environment), showing how refugee entrepreneurs engage with both dimensions (Price and Chacko, 2009). Research demonstrates entrepreneurs in new immigrant gateways form relationships with co-ethnic communities while developing partnerships with local institutional actors, enacting what has been termed 'selective assimilation', thus maintaining ethnic distinctiveness in product offerings while adopting mainstream business practices to broader markets (Price and Chacko, 2009). This navigation of institutional logics aligns with broader research on immigrant entrepreneurship showing how entrepreneurs capitalise on their dual embeddedness (i.e. transnational entrepreneurship) to access diverse resources and market segments (Drori et al., 2009). Such strategic positioning reflects what scholarship characterises as knowledgeable agency, where entrepreneurs consciously utilise contextual understanding to mediate and potentially transform precarious or constraining contexts (Welter, 2011).

Other seminal works point to the theme of ‘past business experience’ being integral to RE (Wauters and Lambrecht, 2007). Wauters and Lambrecht describe how refugees with entrepreneurial backgrounds typically demonstrate a greater capacity to overcome institutional barriers and identify business opportunities compared to nascent entrepreneurs. The coauthors highlight how previous experience essentially equips refugees with transferable skills in financial management, supplier negotiation, and customer relationship building. This entrepreneurial know-how therefore enables experienced entrepreneurs to develop more resilient ventures by anticipating challenges, and adapting business models to local conditions. Their study highlights the importance of recognising and leveraging refugees' existing habitual knowledge and experience rather than treating all refugee entrepreneurs as equally inexperienced.

While prior business experience has been shown to significantly influence RE outcomes (Alrawadieh et al., 2019; Palalić et al., 2018; Wauters and Lambrecht, 2007), it is important to recognise this not to be exclusively attributed to the notion of human capital deficit but as to the relationship between internal and external structures (Refai et al., 2025). Sociological research defines internal structures as the dispositions and knowledge of agents, essentially virtual and intangible, that agents can draw upon in specific contexts (Stones, 2005). Prior entrepreneurial experience therefore represents such internal structures, as exemplified by refugees carry entrepreneurial habitus from origin countries for example. However, the constraint surfaces not from lack of experience per se, but from how the internal structures interface with the external structural barriers. For instance, the non-recognition of qualifications and regulatory differences between host and country of origin, are what Refai et al. (2025) describe as the constrained positions in context. The critical issue here lies not whether refugees possess adequate experience, but how external structures such as institutions prevent the official recognition and deployment of that said experience. As Alrawadieh et al. (2019) report, 70% of refugee entrepreneurs were found to possess adequate business experience, yet the asymmetry of the hosts external structures such as the lack of credential recognition routinely forced adaptation of existing expertise rather than direct application. This tension between possessing skills and accessing opportunities highlights a critical juxtaposition in RE scholarship.

Correspondingly, Palalić et al. (2018) further emphasise that technical expertise is crucial for RE success in host communities. The study documents that refugees with both generic and

entrepreneurship-specific human capital were better able to recognise and exploit entrepreneurial opportunities over their inexperienced counterparts. However, the authors underscored that such technical capacity operates within institutional constraints, whereby recognised qualifications customarily provide a gateway to market access and credibility. The cumulative effect of these findings illustrate that while refugees possess substantive expertise in many cases, their entrepreneurial potential is often at the mercy of institutional powers to formally recognise their imported technical credentials.

Overall, while scholarship has begun examining agentic dimensions associated with RE, three key gaps remain that align with Refai et al.'s (2025) call for more critical entrepreneurship research. First, although the field engages with modestly constrained contexts, refugee entrepreneurs are often positioned as comparative cases against non-refugee normative entrepreneurship rather than as central to understanding how agency manifests under extreme constraint such as refugee camp settings. Second, research has so far insufficiently examined the intersection of all three constraining dimensions simultaneously: (i) external structural constraints of resource scarcity and institutional voids, (ii) imposed positions of refugees within hostile social structures, and (iii) refugees' transformative capacity to enact possibility. Third, the field risks an epistemological fallacy by focusing on micro-level entrepreneurial activities exclusively, when outcomes are largely determined by macro-level structures such as policy (Korsgaard et al., 2025).

Future research must therefore adopt balanced approaches that avoid polarising perspectives (Refai et al., 2025), thus acknowledging refugee entrepreneurial agency while critiquing the structural barriers that necessitate agentic resourcefulness. The field must resist framing entrepreneurship as the ultimate remedy or overly romanticising entrepreneurial narratives while acknowledging its genuine transformative potential for refugees inhabiting constrained contexts.

2.1.2. Geographic Distribution, Methodologies, and Theoretical Foundations

To provide a comprehensive understanding of the current state of RE research, this section examines three empirical dimensions that evidently shape the field's extant literature. First, the geographic distribution of studies is analysed to identify which host countries have received the most scholarly attention and to identify potential gaps in regional coverage. Second, the

methodological approaches employed across the literature are examined, exploring the research designs, data collection methods, and analytical techniques that scholars have used to investigate RE more generally. Finally, the theoretical foundations that underpin this research domain are mapped, identifying the dominant theoretical lenses and frameworks that researchers have applied to understand RE. Together, these three analytical dimensions illustrate not only what is known about RE, but also how this knowledge has been constructed and where future research opportunities may lie.

2.1.2.1. Geographic Distribution

Research on RE exhibits a significant geographical bias toward Global North countries. This bias is problematic given that Global North countries often have established institutional systems to integrate refugees into society, whereas Global South countries frequently lack the resources and institutional frameworks to properly integrate refugees (Lang et al., 2024). Analysing the geographical contexts of the literature illustrates that RE publications are unevenly distributed globally.

According to a recent systematic review of RE scholarship (Abebe, 2023), research is concentrated in Global North settings, with studies focusing on Europe (48), North America (18), and Oceania, namely Australia and New Zealand (8), totalling 74 publications. In contrast, Global South contexts receive less scholarly attention despite housing the overwhelming majority of refugees, with studies covering Asia (26), Africa (21), and South America (2), totalling 49 publications. Lang et al. (2024) further highlight this imbalance, reporting that the United Kingdom, Sweden, and Germany alone account for nearly 40 per cent of RE research in reviewed journals. According to Lang et al. (2024) research on the Global South countries is scattered across many nations preventing comprehensive understanding of these contexts.

Increased research into RE in Global South contexts could address the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal of ‘no poverty’ (SDG 1) while contributing to more geographically representative scholarship that reflects the lived realities of the majority of the world's refugee population.

2.1.2.2. Methodological Approaches

Examining the extant methodological approaches within RE scholarship exhibits a strong preference for qualitative, exploratory, and inductive approaches. There appears to be a myriad of reasons for this methodological trend. First, RE is a relatively nascent and complex field that requires deep understanding of experiences, contexts, and institutional barriers, thus qualitative methods are better suited for exploring such multifaceted phenomena (Heilbrunn and Iannone (2020). Second, RE involves highly personal, culturally embedded, and context-specific experiences that cannot be easily quantified (Harima et al., 2021), thus requiring researchers to capture refugee narratives, motivations, challenges, and strategies that refugees employ when starting businesses. Moreover, the exploratory nature of much RE research aligns naturally with qualitative approaches allowing theory to emerge from the data rather than testing predetermined hypotheses commonly associated with the positivistic paradigm (Silverman, 2021). Third, there is often insufficient baseline data for RE activities, making it difficult to conduct large-scale quantitative studies. Fourth, research has established that refugees may be hesitant to participate in formal surveys or provide quantitative data due to legal status concerns, trauma, or distrust of institutions (Bennouna et al., 2020), thus making qualitative procedures the preferred option for many researchers.

According to Heilbrunn and Iannone (2020), among 68 publications they examined, qualitative methods such as ethnography, field observations, focus groups, and interviews constituted the majority at 57.5% (39 studies), while quantitative approaches using statistics and surveys account for only 13.2% (9 studies). According to the co-authors, mixed methods also represented 13.2% (9 studies) of the research, with the remaining 16.1% (11 studies) utilising other methodologies or being irrelevant to the methodological classification.

This methodological orientation is further confirmed by Abebe's (2023) more recent and comprehensive analysis. Within Abebe's substantial body of literature (116 studies), qualitative approaches constitute an overwhelming 76%, primarily utilising ethnographic data collection strategies including semi-structured interviews, participant observations, and focus groups, typically involving smaller sample sizes and frequently supplemented by analyses of policy documents, organisational reports, and previous research findings. Abebe (2023) notes that quantitative research strategies represent only 10.6% of empirical studies, while mixed-methods approaches account for 12.9%, with many quantitative studies relying on secondary

data sources such as census reports, publicly available datasets, and governmental data repositories, as only a limited number of researchers have undertaken direct quantitative data collection through survey instruments.

Lang et al. (2024) further corroborate these findings, specifically noting that research in the field of entrepreneurship has predominantly employed qualitative approaches with a special focus on data collection through interviews, acknowledging that collecting large surveys from refugees presents significant challenges due to the difficulty in identifying and recruiting these subgroups. While Lang et al. (2024) and Abebe (2023) suggest that incorporating mixed methods or quantitative approaches could broaden the research foundation, the practical constraints of accessing refugee populations seemingly favour the utility of qualitative methodologies.

Notably, despite the prevalence of qualitative approaches, there appears to be a significant lacuna in comparative case study designs within the existing body of literature. Such a distribution is highly indicative of an emergent field of research that has relied heavily on single-case explorations and descriptive studies yet lacks the systematic comparative analysis that could enhance theoretical development and provide deeper insights into RE dynamics. Invariably, comparative case study approaches offer particular value in contexts that may appear superficially analogous, as they expose subtle but significant variations in conditions, processes, and outcomes that would remain hidden in single-case analyses. This approach thereby contributes to more nuanced theoretical understanding and more robust empirical foundations for the field.

2.1.2.3. Theoretical Foundations and Gaps

Table 2 presents the top 10 most frequently applied theoretical frameworks to RE research, derived and adapted from Lang et al.'s (2024) recent systematic study of RE. Their comprehensive review spotlights the theoretical foundations underpinning extant studies, highlighting the dominant conceptual approaches used to understand this phenomenon. While the dominance of these ten frameworks (i.e. 86% of theoretical approaches) suggests some consolidation around core conceptual tools, it also indicates significant theoretical gaps and unexplored analytical possibilities.

A prominent gap according to Lang et al. (2024) relates to a limited understanding of how entrepreneurial journeys unfold within extreme and shifting structural contexts. Thus, there is a pronounced temporal and processual theoretical void, as existing research predominantly adopts static frameworks such as mixed embeddedness and institutional theory. While these frameworks effectively capture structural dimensions such as the politico-regulatory aspects of context, they appear less convincing regarding the role of the agentic dimension (Abebe, 2023). As such these frameworks habitually fail to capture the recursive nature of how entrepreneurs shape institutional constraints and are themselves reshaped by these institutional structures through their entrepreneurial trajectories.

Rank	Theoretical Framework	Paper Count	% of Literature	Representative authors
1	Mixed Embeddedness	17	20%	Kloosterman (2003, 2010); Bagwell (2008, 2018); Dahles (2013)
2	Social Networks	12	15%	Bizri (2017); Williams & Krasniqi (2018); Sandberg et al. (2019)
3	Self-Employment	12	15%	Andersson & Hammarstedt (2010); Clark et al. (2017); Levie (2007)
4	Opportunity Theory	11	13%	Harima & Freudenberg (2020); Guerrero et al. (2021); Khosa & Kalitanyi (2015)
5	Institutional Theory	11	13%	de la Chaux & Haugh (2020); Williams (2020); Heilbrunn (2019)
6	Integration Theory	9	11%	Wauters & Lambrecht (2006); Bird & Wennberg (2016); Backman et al. (2021)
7	Ethnic Networks & Context	9	11%	Cruz et al. (2020); Hack-Polay (2019); Fadahunsi et al. (2000)
8	Social Capital	7	8%	Loschmann & Marchand (2021); Zehra & Usmani (2023); Kloosterman (2010)
9	Human Capital	7	8%	Vinogradov & Jørgensen (2017); Bird & Wennberg (2016); Guerrero et al. (2021)
10	Family Networks & Resources	7	8%	Al-Dajani & Marlow (2010); Tan & Fock (2001); Kazlou & Wennberg (2021)

Table 2: Top 10 applied theoretical frameworks to RE research (adapted from Lang et al 2024)

This has led to calls for theoretical frameworks that can accommodate both dimensions simultaneously combined with theories that can adequately contextualise entrepreneurial journeys within specific circumstances (Garud et al., 2007), including the unique conditions of displacement contexts such as refugee camps. As such, there is an apparent lack of process-based frameworks (Abebe, 2023) that can adequately account for the journey towards entrepreneurship entry and specifically what actions are undertaken by refugee agents to commence their entrepreneurial trajectory in their newly adopted context. This perspective further aligns with Obschonka and Hahn (2018) observation that there is considerable lack of focus on the personal agency of refugees with their societal structure, despite individual agency being crucial to understanding how agents decipher opportunities, overcome constraints, and establish entrepreneurial ventures (McMullen et al., 2021). Future analyses must therefore place sufficient account to the agentic dimension with equal attention to the associated structural contexts where agency operates (Villares-Varela et al., 2022), whilst acknowledging the multiple structural layers within complex displacement settings, such as refugee camps.

Overall, the prevalence of the aforementioned frameworks seemingly reflects theoretical biases and methodological convenience rather than finding optimal fit for understanding the phenomenon of RE within CICs. For example, the table topping performance of mixed embeddedness (20%), followed by social networks (15%), signifies theoretical tunnel vision and academic trend hopping. Such frameworks either overemphasise structural constraints (embeddedness) or focus on relational resources (networks) without considering the recursive relationship between agency and institutional reproduction/transformation. While the prevalence of opportunity theory (13%) and human capital theory (8%), may represent an appreciation for agency-based approaches, they customarily relegate the role of structure in this theoretical mix.

Structuration theory (ST) (Giddens, 1984; Stones, 2005) on the other hand offers a happy medium to this problem yet does not feature in the above table nor in previous systematic reviews (Abebe, 2023; Lang et al., 2024; Newman et al., 2024) on RE scholarship. In essence, ST offers a potential framework for contextualising how refugee entrepreneurs develop the institutional contexts they adopt and conversely, how these said structures also influence the refugee's individual and collective agency over time. This gap may explain why the field remains stuck between the notions of structural determinism and methodological individualism (Nicholson et al., 2014), thereby leading to underdeveloped theory.

ST therefore offers a suitable framework to move beyond this theoretical impasse towards a more rigorous and nuanced understanding of the transformative potential refugee entrepreneurs possess. From a scholarly perspective, the segmentation of structure and agency customarily leads to an unnecessary narrowing of theory. Studies emphasising structural constraints such as mixed embeddedness typically frame immigrants/refugees as victims (Högberg and Mitchell, 2023), while agency-focused studies like human capital theory routinely overlook the role of socioeconomic structures in favour of comprehending human behaviour (Tan, 2014). This fragmentation therefore prevents the development of holistic and conducive frameworks for better understanding RE. Additionally, theoretical fragmentation may lead to policy implications owing ultimately to weakened theorisation. For instance, initiatives designed from purely structural perspectives may focus solely on removing barriers without recognising refugee potential, while those emphasising the human element exclusively may underestimate the institutional changes necessary to facilitate sustainable entrepreneurship ventures. Thus, this may lead to ineffective interventions that either demean refugee entrepreneurs or expect them to succeed despite all odds.

Furthermore, RE often involves collective agency thereby typically involving community-level institutional entrepreneurship that leads to new opportunity structures for subsequent entrepreneurs (Ben-Hafaïedh et al., 2024). Thus, frameworks that are not capable of analysing the multiplier effects of agency will inevitably overlook crucial dynamics that distinguish RE from other forms of constrained entrepreneurship. This theoretical gap therefore restricts both the current understanding of RE and the development of effective policy for supporting refugee entrepreneurial success.

2.1.3. Refugee Camp Entrepreneurship

While the broader RE literature encompasses various contexts and settings, refugee camp entrepreneurship (RCE) represents a distinct and nascent field of inquiry. This research domain is typically embedded in Global South locales, where the majority of the world's refugee camps are situated. Unlike the general RE studies that often examine entrepreneurial activities in institutionally developed countries, the specific study of RCE accentuates the unique entrepreneurial dynamics that emerge within CICs, where refugees can be seen to exercise economic agency in spite of experiencing severe resource constraints and regulatory restrictions.

Table 3 synthesises key empirical studies relating to RCE, covering research conducted between 2005 and 2025. Studies were identified through a systematic search of academic databases using keywords related to ‘refugee camps’, ‘refugee camp entrepreneurship’ and ‘refugee camp business’ specifically, focusing on peer-reviewed empirical research published within the last twenty years. This limited body of literature represents an emerging field of research that sits at the nexus of forced migration research, development economics and entrepreneurship studies.

In sum, the reviewed studies examine refugee camp scholarship across diverse geographical landscapes belonging to the Global South, including the Dadaab camps in Kenya, Dzaleka camp in Malawi, Umkulu camp in Eritrea, Tindouf camps in Algeria, and Kyangwali Settlement in Uganda, with particular attention to the Zaatari camp in Jordan. Evidently, these studies employ diverse theoretical frameworks and methodological approaches, reflecting the interdisciplinary nature of RE scholarship. While the quantitatively inclined studies examine the economic impacts and business characteristics associated with refugee camp scholarship, the majority adopt qualitative approaches exploring the social, cultural, and institutional dimensions of entrepreneurship within constrained environments. Overall, the studies highlight common themes around institutional theory, social capital mobilisation, and the tension between formal restrictions and informal economic practices.

Author, Year	Theoretical Framework	Research Method	Data Collection	Main Contribution	Refugees/ Host Nation
Abushaikha et al (2021)	Social capital theory (bonding, bridging, linking); Network governance theory;	Exploratory case study; Inductive design	52 interviews (Arabic/English); Field observations; Archival data; Photos/videos	Develops theory of informal supply networks with three dimensions: legitimation, social capital positioning, governance conventions	Syrian refugees / Zaatari camp, Jordan
Alkhaled and Sasaki (2022)	Liminality theory, Identity work theory	Qualitative: Multiple case study (longitudinal), Ethnography; Grounded theory	105 interviews; Observations and social media archives	Develops the notion of ‘indeterminate liminality’- a state where agents manifest with perpetual constrained agency. Identifies 3 coping mechanisms: recomposing conflicting memories, reclaiming existence, and repositioning tradition	Syrian refugees / Zaatari camp, Jordan and United Kingdom (UNHCR resettlement program)
Alloush et al (2017)	Economic theory; Microeconomic theory of resource allocation; Development economics	Quantitative analysis; Randomised controlled trial	Economic surveys of refugee households (155-224 per camp) and host households (162-243 per camp); Business surveys	Analyses economic life in refugee camps and interactions with host economies; compares in-kind vs cash aid delivery mechanisms	Congolese refugees, Rwanda
Brown and Desire (2021)	Actor-Network Theory (ANT)	Qualitative case study	25 structured interviews with refugee entrepreneurs (45-60 minutes each), conducted in native languages	ICT use is common among refugee entrepreneurs, but digital literacy is main obstacle. WhatsApp and Facebook most used for low data consumption.	Diverse refugees (Ethiopia, Somalia, Rwanda, Burundi, Democratic Republic of the Congo), Dzaleka refugee camp, Malawi
de la Chaux and Haugh (2020)	Institutional Theory (formal and informal institutions, institutional misalignment)	Qualitative case study	45 Interviews (camp managers, aid workers, refugees), observations, secondary data analysis, mobile phone interviews	Three mechanisms for RE: eroding formal institutions, recombining formal/informal institutions, exploiting	Somali refugees in Dadaab refugee camps, Kenya

				institutional misalignment.	
Harima and Plak (2025)	Adaptive Sensemaking Theory; Liminality Theory	Qualitative (Inductive)	Semi-structured interviews (30 total: 27 refugee entrepreneurs, 3 humanitarian managers); Field observations; Secondary data analysis	Develops framework for adaptive sensemaking in perpetual liminality; Identifies mechanisms of reinforcing/harming plausibility of collective accounts; Conceptualizes refugee camps as perpetual liminal spaces	Somali refugees / Umkulu camp, Eritrea
Kachkar (2019)	Entrepreneurship theory; Development economics; Microfinance theory	Quantitative survey research Survey of refugee microenterprises in multiple refugee camps	questionnaire-based data collection	Examines current situations of refugee microenterprises; finds 25% of respondents started businesses, 80% willing to participate in micro entrepreneurship	Syrian refugees (multiple camps) / Turkey
Shepherd et al (2020)	Resilience theory; Positive psychology; Identity theory; Entrepreneurship theory	Qualitative; Abductive approach; Grounded theory	110 interviews over 15 months (28 entrepreneurs, 25 spouses, 28 customers, 6 NGO reps, 26 Lebanese citizens); Field notes; Archival data	Develops grounded model showing how entrepreneurial action enables resilience to substantial and persistent adversity through direct/indirect/recursive relationships with multiple identities	Palestinian refugees / Lebanon
Tavakoli (2020)	Cultural Entrepreneurship Theory; Cultural Heritage Theory	Qualitative (Ethnographic)	Ethnographic fieldwork; Participant observation; Semi-structured interviews (number not specified) with entrepreneurs and cultural producers; Secondary data analysis	Examines evolution of cultural entrepreneurship over four decades; Analyses policy changes affecting income-generating activities; Explores tension between temporality/dependency and sustainability	Sahrawi refugees / Tindouf camps, Algeria
Turner (2020)	Critical race theory; Postcolonial theory;	Ethnographic; Critical discourse analysis	27 days participant observation; 28	Argues that designation of Syrian refugees as	Syrian refugees / Zaatari camp, Jordan

	Humanitarian studies; Anti-blackness scholarship		humanitarian worker interviews; 10 donor/think tank official interviews; 32 Syrian refugee interviews; Online content analysis	'entrepreneurs' positions them within colonial racial hierarchies to distinguish them from 'African' refugees	
Werker (2007)	Economic Theory; Development Economics	Qualitative (Case Study)	Field research; Interviews (number not specified); Participant observation; Secondary data analysis	Develops generic model of refugee camp economy; Identifies key economic distortions in camp settings; Proposes framework for understanding camp economies	Kyangwali Refugee Settlement, Uganda

Table 3: Examples of refugee camp scholarship (2005–2025)

2.1.3.1. Limitations of Extant Refugee Camp Entrepreneurship Scholarship

Overall, the extant literature on RCE demonstrates a diverse theoretical landscape with clear conceptual gaps. Current scholarship employs social capital theory, institutional theory, actor-network theory, and resilience frameworks, yet these approaches often fail to frame the fundamental duality which characterises RE. Werker's (2007) foundational paper on refugee camp economies provided the theoretical groundwork for understanding these unique economies by developing a generic model that identifies key economic distortions in camp settings. While this early contribution provides some insights into camp economics, subsequent theoretical developments have struggled to advance Werker's structural focus toward more nuanced frameworks that can adequately incorporate both agency-structure interactions.

The limitations of some of the dominant theoretical approaches becomes further evident when examining recent applications. For instance, social capital theory treats structures as fixed backdrops rather than dynamic phenomena, with Abushaikh et al.'s (2021) study of the Zaatari camp demonstrating how social capital operates within predetermined arrangements without explaining how entrepreneurial action might transform these very structures. Moreover, institutional theory focuses on formal and informal institutions but struggles to explain how refugees actively reshape these very institutions through entrepreneurial practices (McMullen et al., 2021). Alternative theoretical approaches, such as Brown and Desire's (2021) application of Actor-Network Theory to ICT use among refugees in Malawi's Dzaleka camp, offer different analytical possibilities by examining how technology mediates refugee-institutional relationships. However, the focus on network assemblages fails to capture the relationship between agency and structure that exhibit entrepreneurial transformation. The theoretical gaps are further highlighted by the limited empirical evidence base. Kachkar's (2019) quantitative survey of Syrian refugee microenterprises in Turkish camps provides rare statistical evidence (i.e. 25% of respondents had started businesses, 80% expressed willingness to participate in micro-entrepreneurship), yet these findings remain disconnected from qualitative frameworks capable of explaining the mechanisms behind such rates and their broader implications.

Inherently, the notion of a refugee camp represents an optimal setting for the application of ST. Essentially, these camps manifest as highly structured environments with formal institutional arrangements, hierarchical governance systems, and explicit rules, which routinely constrict and constrain the actions of their inhabitants. This contextual duality therefore frames the camp as a natural social laboratory for examining the associated structuration processes, whereby

both structural constraints and agentic responses combine. Furthermore, refugee camps simultaneously epitomise complete institutional control, thus making them ideal for examining what Giddens coins the ‘dialectic of control’ (Giddens, 1984, p. 25). Giddens' theory therefore offers a pertinent framework uniquely suited to contextualise RCE. Through conceptualising structure and agency as mutually constitutive rather than opposing forces, the theory provides a framework for understanding how refugee entrepreneurs reproduce or even transform camp constraints. Moreover, ST’s positing of power as transformative capacity further resonates with the refugee narrative, whereby displaced individuals attempt to exercise agency despite institutional constraints.

This theoretical positioning becomes particularly important when considering RCE within the broader context of constrained institutional entrepreneurship. The structural arrangements and agentic responses that manifest in camp settings therefore has the potential to provide valuable insights into how the notion of transformative capacity is actualised within these constrained contexts. Thus, ST’s capacity to illuminate the relationship between constraints and entrepreneurial action offers a framework for understanding not just RE, but constrained entrepreneurship across various contexts where institutional limitations create both barriers and opportunities for entrepreneurial innovation. The refugee camp context thus serves as an extreme case that can accentuate broader patterns of how entrepreneurs mediate, reproduce and even transform such structural constraints.

2.2. Chapter Summary

This chapter reviewed the refugee entrepreneurship literature across two interconnected levels of analysis. The first section examined refugee entrepreneurship as a distinct field of inquiry, beginning with prevalent themes including the differences between refugee and immigrant entrepreneurship across dimensions of departure circumstances, legal status, resource access, network capabilities, and psychological barriers. The review then analysed the impact of refugee entrepreneurship on host societies at micro, meso, and macro levels, before examining the institutional factors that shape entrepreneurial activity, tracing the constraining and enabling dimensions of institutional structures and the role of institutional voids. The agentic dimension of refugee entrepreneurship was also examined, highlighting how refugees exercise purposeful action within and against institutional constraints. The section concluded by mapping the geographic distribution of extant studies, critiquing prevailing methodological approaches, and identifying theoretical gaps that motivate the current study.

The second section examined refugee camp entrepreneurship as a distinct subset of the broader refugee entrepreneurship literature, analysing the specific conditions of camp environments and their implications for entrepreneurial agency. The limitations of extant refugee camp entrepreneurship scholarship were assessed, establishing the empirical and conceptual gaps that the theoretical framework developed in Chapter 3 seeks to address.

CHAPTER 3: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

3.0. Introduction

This chapter develops the theoretical foundations underpinning the study. Having established the empirical context and identified the key gaps in the refugee entrepreneurship literature in Chapter 2, the present chapter constructs the conceptual architecture through which those gaps are addressed. The chapter opens by examining agency theory in entrepreneurship, tracing its development through the interplay between structure and agency, the dual nature of institutions, embedded agency, opportunity creation, temporal dimensions, and collective action. Contemporary frameworks are then critically assessed, with their limitations motivating the case for structuration theory as a more adequate analytical lens. The chapter concludes by reviewing Strong Structuration Theory and appraising the limitations of its extant applications, thereby establishing the theoretical warrant for the extensions developed in this study.

3.1. Agency Theory in Entrepreneurship

The application of agency theory to extant scholarship provides a useful lens for understanding how entrepreneurs exercise purposeful action and make choices in spite of institutional constraints. While traditional applications of agency theory characteristically focus on the principal-agent relationship (Eisenhardt, 1989), entrepreneurship-specific agency theory examines the broader question of how entrepreneurs act as purposeful agents of change within complex institutional and social structures (McMullen et al., 2021).

This review section presents key theoretical perspectives around entrepreneurial agency, positioning it within the broader conversation about structure versus agency in entrepreneurship research. The theoretical foundations draw heavily from sociological theories of agency, namely Giddens' (1984) original version of structuration theory and Emirbayer and Mische's (1998) temporal iteration, while incorporating entrepreneurship-specific insights about opportunity creation, venture development, and institutional transformation. This review section further provides the theoretical underpinnings for understanding how agency may function in CICs, thereby essential for examining entrepreneurial action within refugee camp settings.

3.1.1. The Interplay Between Structure & Agency in Entrepreneurship

Sarason et al. (2010) conceptualised entrepreneurial agency as involving the ability to envision and enact new economic realities, emphasising that actors do not merely respond to existing opportunities but rather reconstruct opportunities through their agentic dimensions. This challenges the traditional opportunity recognition thesis by highlighting the creative and constructive nature of entrepreneurial behaviour. Ramoglou and Tsang (2016) advance this perspective through their realist outlook, conceptualising opportunities as market structures being converted into profits through entrepreneurial action. This philosophical reframing remedies the discovery versus creation debate by positioning opportunities as being real, yet untapped, thus requiring entrepreneurial action to unlock the potential. This becomes even more significant in constrained contexts where traditional opportunities are often scarce.

However, this agentic capacity to reframe opportunities accentuates a theoretical conundrum about the relationship between structural constraints and entrepreneurial action (Lok and Willmott, 2019). If entrepreneurs are embedded in institutional fields that help form their cognitions, identities, and resources, then the question arises: how can they initiate structural change to their environment? Understanding this paradox is important for understanding why some entrepreneurs appear to transform existing structures while others remain constrained by them, and why institutional change often emerges from within established systems rather than through direct opposition to them.

3.1.1.1. The Dual Nature of Institutions

Welter (2011) explores how institutional contexts both enable and constrain entrepreneurial agency. Building on this, institutions can hinder or enable entrepreneurship depending on the different authority positions that entrepreneurs assume within CICs (Refai and McElwee, 2023). This institutional duality creates what scholars conceptualise as a fundamental tension in entrepreneurship research. Institutions can enable entrepreneurship by providing property rights protection, contract enforcement mechanisms, and clear regulatory guidelines that reduce uncertainty and facilitate market transactions. Yet, these same formal institutions can constrain entrepreneurial activity through bureaucratic red tape, restrictive licensing requirements, and complex regulatory compliance costs that disproportionately burden new and small ventures. These barriers of entry can invariably deter potential entrepreneurs from

launching their businesses, while complex tax and labour regulations can further increase the operational costs associated with these ventures.

In juxtaposition, informal institutions, encompassing cultural norms, social values, and shared beliefs about entrepreneurship, play an equally important role (Scott, 2014). Such informal institutions shape whether cultures celebrate entrepreneurial success, tolerate failure, and promote risk-taking, thereby creating supportive or constraining environments for entrepreneurial activity. The Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM) report demonstrates this institutional variation empirically: entrepreneurial activity rates vary dramatically across countries, with Total early-stage Entrepreneurial Activity (TEA) ranging from 3.4% in Japan to 39.5% in Chile, thus reflecting divergent cultural attitudes toward entrepreneurship and risk-taking (GEM, 2024). GEM (2024) data further shows that perceived entrepreneurial capabilities also vary significantly by context. In innovation and tech driven economies (i.e. United States, Germany, and South Korea), 47% of adults report having the skills to start a business, compared to 61% in resource-based economies (i.e. Uganda, Pakistan, and Madagascar), thus suggesting cultural differences in entrepreneurial self-efficacy. However, informal institutions can also constrain entrepreneurship through social stigma associated with business failure, cultural preferences for stable employment, or norms that discourage deviation from established career paths (Stenholm et al., 2013). GEM (2024) data further illustrates this trend: fear of failure prevents 41% of adults globally from starting businesses, with significant regional variation, reaching 54% in European economies where cultural stigma around failure remains pronounced. Similarly, societal attitudes toward entrepreneurship as a career choice vary from 77% positive perception in Latin America, to only 54% in Far Eastern regions, thereby reflecting cultural norms around conventional employment versus entrepreneurship pathways (GEM, 2024).

In sum, this institutional duality suggests that the relationship between institutions and entrepreneurship is context-dependent, thus requiring a balanced view to understand how different institutional configurations can enable or constrain entrepreneurial agency across various contexts and time periods (Autio et al., 2014).

3.1.1.2. Embedded Agency and Strategic Responses

The dual nature of institutions gives rise to the concept of embedded agency, how actors can act purposefully within constraining structures whilst working to transform them. While some scholars frame this as a paradox, Lok and Willmott (2019) argue that treating embedded agency as paradoxical represents a phantom problem, thus suggesting actors routinely exercise transformative capacity without theoretical contradiction. This recognises that entrepreneurs are neither completely free nor passive subjects of structural determinism. Rather, they operate within 'institutional contradictions', spaces where competing forces meet, creating opportunities for entrepreneurs to exploit and challenge the status quo (Seo and Creed, 2002). Such contradictions become particularly evident in CICs, where entrepreneurs readily experience multiple structural limitations while still exercising transformative agency (Refai et al., 2024).

Research on investor-entrepreneur dynamics demonstrates how entrepreneurs exercise agency in responding to institutional constraints and misalignments within their ecosystems. Korber et al. (2022) identified six strategic responses entrepreneurs use when facing institutional misalignments: enduring strategies (comply, compromise, educate) and escape strategies (exit, avoid, hide). These strategies demonstrate how entrepreneurs exercise agency not just in venture creation but in actively reshaping their institutional environments.

Beyond these reactive responses, entrepreneurs also exercise what Maguire et al. (2004) term 'institutional entrepreneurship', actively creating, maintaining, or disrupting institutional arrangements through informal strategies, theorising new practices, and building legitimacy for institutional change. This highlights how entrepreneurial agency extends beyond venture creation to institutional transformation, with entrepreneurs serving as change agents who reshape the rules of the game rather than merely playing within existing rules. However, the notion of escape strategies may be particularly problematic when examining the empirical landscape of refugee camps, where physical, legal, and economic constraints severely limit entrepreneurs' ability to exit, avoid, or hide from institutional powers.

3.1.1.3. Opportunity Creation versus Discovery

Alvarez and Barney (2007) distinguish between the discovery and creation thesis concerning entrepreneurial opportunities, with important implications for understanding entrepreneurial agency. The co-authors view the discovery perspective as implying a more passive form of

agency based on the premise of recognising pre-existing opportunity spaces, while the creationist thesis essentially posits that opportunities are enacted primarily through entrepreneurial action. This distinction therefore reframes entrepreneurial agency from a cognitive capacity for mere alertness to a capacity for actively constructing market realities through entrepreneurship activities. Extending this creationist perspective, scholars have highlighted the role of entrepreneurial imagination in opportunity creation, where entrepreneurs envision possibilities that do not yet exist within current market structures (Gartner et al., 2025). This imaginative capacity enables entrepreneurs to project future scenarios, reconceptualise existing resources, and mentally construct new venture configurations before they materialise, thereby representing a cognitive dimension of opportunity creation that guides entrepreneurial action.

Sarasvathy's (2001) effectuation theory operationalises the creation perspective by describing how entrepreneurs use available means to create new ends, emphasising agency through stakeholder commitment, affordable loss principles, and leveraging contingencies. Rather than beginning with predetermined goals and seeking optimal means to achieve them (i.e. causation), effectual entrepreneurs begin with available means and discover ends through stakeholder interactions and experimentation. Effectuation proves particularly valuable for understanding entrepreneurship in resource-constrained environments where predetermined goals may prove unrealistic given available means, thus making the creation perspective especially relevant for contexts such as refugee camps where discoverable opportunities may be severely limited.

However, this imaginative and creative agency is not without limitation. McMullen and Kier (2016) demonstrate how entrepreneurial opportunity-seeking behaviour can lead to escalation of commitment when environmental conditions deteriorate, with entrepreneurs continuing to pursue imagined opportunities despite contrary evidence. Their analysis of the 1996 Mount Everest disaster illustrates how the same imaginative capacity that enables opportunity creation can become detached from environmental realities, thus suggesting that creative agency requires metacognitive awareness to distinguish between productive imagination and counterproductive persistence.

3.1.1.4. Temporal Dimensions of Agency

The concept of embedded agency accentuates the temporal dimension of structure and agency. Entrepreneurship scholars suggest three identifiable dimensions through which entrepreneurial agency can be actualised, each involving different cognitive processes and strategic orientations toward action (Emirbayer and Mische, 1998). This temporal framing proves useful for comprehending how entrepreneurs draw upon *past* experiences, respond to *present* circumstances, and project *future* possibilities to actualise agency.

Habitual agency involves actors drawing upon their past experiences, habits, and established practices to inform present actions (Stones, 2005). Research describes how serial entrepreneurs utilise prior business experience to advance their agentic capacity in subsequent ventures, thus developing what might be termed 'entrepreneurial capital' (Dimov, 2010). This capital proves pertinent in constrained contexts where agents must readily rely upon built-up knowledge to identify alternate ways when traditional capital is limited. More recent research examines this notion of entrepreneurial capital through the lens of social class origins (Brändle and Kuckertz, 2022), concluding that individuals from privileged backgrounds accumulate experiences that enhance their subsequent capability to exercise entrepreneurial agency. This research posits how past experiences form differential capacities for current entrepreneurial action, suggesting that habitual-based agency is not equally distributed across different social groups.

Practical-evaluative based agency refers to the actor's ability to respond to the present predicament, involving real-time problem-solving capabilities to mediate challenges associated with the here-and-now (Stones, 2005). Baker and Nelson's (2005) paper on entrepreneurial bricolage effectively illustrates this temporal dimension, showcasing how resource-constrained entrepreneurs exercise practical-evaluative agency by creatively recombining and repurposing available resources. McMullen and Kier's (2016) work adds nuance to this understanding by demonstrating how practical-evaluative agency becomes constrained during goal implementation phases, where entrepreneurs' blind focus on achievement for example can compromise their ability to monitor, and thus adapt accordingly to their context.

More recent studies similarly highlight the role of practical-evaluative agency through the example of 'patch-working' strategies (Villares-Varela et al., 2020), where entrepreneurs utilise multiple income streams, operate business portfolios, and implement survival strategies to exercise agency within constrained contexts. Their study focusing on 42 migrant businesses in the West Midlands (UK), found that patch-working, whilst enabling business survival and

moderate growth, rarely achieved fundamental transformation, thus illustrating both the potential and constraints of practical-evaluative agency in constrained contexts.

Projective agency involves the entrepreneurs' ability to imagine future possibilities and work toward predictable outcomes (Emirbayer and Mische, 1998). Research associates this type of agency with the ability to recognise opportunity structures, whereby entrepreneurs are required to assess future potential to identify viable opportunities (McMullen and Shepherd, 2006). This forward-looking dimension requires agents to utilise probability thinking and to work retrospectively to identify the necessary actions to convert potential into desired outcomes. This transformative capacity becomes particularly relevant in constrained environments where present circumstances may otherwise limit agentic imagination through the realisation to conform with institutional powers. While agents may initially yield to existing institutional arrangements to facilitate the planning phase of their entrepreneurial pathway, they later challenge and transform these same structures once they have become acclimatised to the environment. This developmental process demonstrates how agency can emerge from within the midst of structural constraints, where the same institutional structures that initially constrained action eventually become the foundation for transformative change.

3.1.1.5. Collective Agency and Social Embeddedness

Building upon the embedded agency thesis, the concept of collective and distributed agency develops the understanding of traditional agency from the individual perspective to incorporate relationships and social networks (Garud and Karnøe, 2003). This viewpoint challenges the overly romanticised assumption of lone figures gifted with innate transformative powers to recognise that outcomes rarely come from singular acts of ingenuity but from aggregate and collective feats of agency stemming from relationships and interactions with other active and passive agents.

Entrepreneurial agency is fundamentally embedded in social networks and relationships that both enable and constrain action, challenging individualistic conceptualisations of entrepreneurship. This social dimension recognises that entrepreneurs operate within webs of relationships that provide access to resources, information, and legitimacy while also imposing social obligations and expectations. Network embeddedness influences entrepreneurs' access to resources and opportunities, thereby affecting their agentic capacity. However, recent

research has moved beyond viewing networks as simple structural constraints or enablers to examine how entrepreneurs strategically exercise agency in mobilising their networks. Vissa (2012) demonstrated how entrepreneurs actively shape their network relationships through strategic choices about network activation, challenging earlier views that treated networks as exogenous factors.

At the micro-level, Kier and McMullen (2020) report that collective agency manifests through team formation and ideation processes. Their study of a startup initiative shows that new venture 'idea quality' surfaces from specific configurations of team members' creative, social, and practical imaginativeness. The authors identify multiple pathways to high-quality ideation, including teams with overlapping imaginativeness profiles e.g. '*We Think Alike*' and those with complementary profiles e.g. '*We Understand How Each Other Thinks*'. Critically, all high-performing configurations required sufficient overlap in social imaginativeness to facilitate communication and coordination, suggesting that collective agency in entrepreneurial teams depends on shared cognitive capabilities that enable effective collaboration rather than pure diversity of skills. Refai et al. (2024) extend this collective dimension beyond individual enterprises, demonstrating how a single entrepreneur's actions can lead to collective agency through their conception of the sustainable ripple effect of actions. Their study of rural entrepreneurship in Jordan shows how one entrepreneur's use of innovation and mentorship subsequently led to other community based entrepreneurial initiatives thus promoting sustainable development.

The research on migrant entrepreneurs provides compelling evidence of how social embeddedness shapes agency expression in constrained contexts. Villares-Varela et al. (2022) study demonstrates how migrant entrepreneurs leverage community networks and ethnic resources while simultaneously working to transcend ethnic enclave limitations. Their patch-working strategies emerge partly from social embeddedness within migrant communities but also reflect efforts to access mainstream economic opportunities. This research illustrates how social embeddedness can both enable business survival and limit transformation, as entrepreneurs balance community obligations with individual advancement goals.

3.1.2. Contemporary Agency Frameworks

Recent conceptual developments have attempted to systematise the understanding of entrepreneurship agency through frameworks that organise and sequence key prerequisites for entrepreneurial potential, action, and transformation. Two notable examples emerge from recent conceptual scholarship: the *AMOIP framework* and the *CAMO model*, each offering unique ways in contextualising how entrepreneurial agency may manifest within institutional contexts.

3.1.2.1. The AMOIP Framework

Developed by McMullen et al. (2021), the AMOIP framework provides the researcher with a theoretical toolkit to understand transformative agency, proposing five key constructs which form the acronym AMOIP: Ability, Motivation, Opportunity, Institutions, and Process. According to these authors, this bespoke framing attempts to bridge individual-level factors (i.e. ability, motivation) with contextual conditions (i.e. opportunities, institutions) to explain how entrepreneurial action can lead to structural change. Essentially, the framework posits both ability and motivation as internal human constructs that form the predictive markers of entrepreneurial performance. Thus, the notion of ability comprises skills, knowledge, and capacity for action, while motivation denotes the psychological drivers that induce the agent toward entrepreneurial action. Combined with the external condition of opportunity structures signifies the temporal and spatial fields where entrepreneurial action occurs (Elster, 2015). McMullen et al. propose that these three constructs – A-M-O, form the foundation for understanding whether an agent possesses the transformative potential to initiate change agency.

Next, the authors accentuate the role of the institutional context on determining which actors may develop into active agents capable of enacting structural change. Yet according to renowned proponents of agency theory (Giddens, 1984), the duality of institutional structures habitually forms the benefits and costs associated with action, potentially discouraging transformative agency thus promoting conformity or the reproduction of existing social structures. To address this caveat, McMullen et al. (2021) posit the notion of institutional immunisation, thereby forming as the fourth component of the framework. Plainly, this concept involves agents developing or possessing hypothetical resistance against institutional norms and practices associated with the status quo, thus enabling agents to withstand the notion of

conformity. This abstract form of immunisation seemingly allows entrepreneurs to exercise agency in spite of institutional constraints.

Refai and McElwee (2023) theorise that entrepreneurs in CICs develop this immunisation through leveraging implicit skills, such as unrecognised capabilities including special expertise, knowledge, and bargaining power that may not be ordinarily recognised by institutions. This capacity enables entrepreneurs to escape the confirmative effects associated with institutional structures whilst becoming inoculated to the effects of institutionalisation, thus facilitating transformative action (Refai and McElwee, 2023). Critically, this immunisation develops iteratively as entrepreneurs encounter successive barriers, gradually building the resilience and process skills necessary for transformative action.

The final construct in the framework relates to the notion of process skills associated with the entrepreneurial activity. McMullen et al. (2021) maintain that transformation inevitably requires time, as positive outcomes are seldom straightforward. This non-linear process therefore involves developing key skills that strengthen immunisation capacity, enabling entrepreneurs to withstand extended periods of hardship necessary for achieving positive outcomes and structural change.

3.1.2.2. The CAMO Framework

The CAMO framework (Context-Agency-Mechanism-Outcomes) proposes a more streamlined approach to understanding entrepreneurial agency. Developed by Romme and Dimov (2021) within the field of design science, the model begins with context analysis, thereby requiring the researcher to initially examine the institutional field in which agents find themselves embedded. *Context* analysis according to the authors comprises the external conditions that can either constrain or enable the actions of agents, thus providing the structural backdrop within which entrepreneurial action takes place.

Next, the concept of *agency* can be contextualised, which refers to the process through which actors engage with their external structures. In this construct, the authors draw heavily on Emirbayer and Mische's (1998) temporal framing, thus incorporate the agent's past experiences, present evaluative capabilities, and future projections as a foundation for agency output. Thereafter, the component of *mechanism* can be studied, thereby focusing on the drivers of intended or unintended consequences. Romme and Dimov (2021) describe here that capable

agents can problem solve by applying their knowledge, with mechanisms such as goal setting and information sharing serving as examples of problem-solving capabilities that enable entrepreneurial action. Finally, the construct of *outcomes* can be examined, representing the net outcome resulting from the sequential interactions of C-A-M. Ultimately these net patterns can be either intended or unintended, indicating the unpredictable nature of entrepreneurial action within institutional contexts.

3.1.2.3. Limitations of Extant Frameworks

While both AMOIP and CAMO provide valuable insights into entrepreneurial agency, certain limitations potentially highlight they may not be suitable for studying entrepreneurship agency in severely constrained contexts like refugee camps. First, there are no documented empirical studies that have applied these frameworks to date; thus, their empirical utility is unknown. Second, both frameworks adopt seemingly linear approaches that may oversimplify the non-sequential nature of entrepreneurial agency in refugee contexts. For example, the AMOIP's sequential progression from potential to active agency seemingly fails to consider the complex negotiations refugees must undertake with multiple, often conflicting institutional actors simultaneously. Similarly, CAMO's sequencing from context, agency, mechanisms, and to outcomes ostensibly treats context as merely being external conditions that constrain or enable actions, which may fail to conceptualise the inadvertent embeddedness faced by refugee camp entrepreneurs. Unlike conventional business contexts where entrepreneurs can freely exit adverse contexts, encamped refugees cannot simply leave their camps for prolonged periods.

Beyond these contemporary agency-based frameworks, several more established theories warrant consideration for studying RE more generally. Lang et al. (2024) identify these as among the most frequently applied theoretical frameworks in RE scholarship, yet each presents limitations when examining entrepreneurship in severely constrained contexts such as refugee camps. For instance, Institutional theory (Heilbrunn, 2019), illuminates how formal and informal rules shape entrepreneurial behaviour in constrained contexts but tends to emphasise structural determinism over entrepreneurial agency, customarily underrepresenting refugees' capacity for institutional work and transformation in resource-constrained contexts. Resource-based theories (Al-Dajani and Marlow, 2010) typically focus on internal resources and capabilities but struggle to account for how entrepreneurs create resources from seemingly nothing in resource-scarce environments like refugee camps. Opportunity-based theories,

particularly bricolage (de la Chaux and Haugh, 2020), offer a more promising lens for understanding agency by examining how entrepreneurs recombine and repurpose available resources in refugee camp settings. However, bricolage entrepreneurship tends to elevate agency and resourcefulness excessively, thus overemphasising the agentic dimension while underplaying the role of institutional structures that fundamentally shape which resources are available.

Social identity and network theories (Bizri, 2017) explain how group membership shapes entrepreneurial motivations and strategies but provide insufficient attention to the material and institutional structures that enable or constrain identity-based action. Embeddedness theory, particularly mixed embeddedness (Kloosterman et al., 1999), recognises how economic action is embedded within social relations. However, the theory is limited by its context-specificity, as it was developed primarily in European contexts and may overlook the dimensions of embeddedness in refugee camps where exit options are evidently restricted.

Given these collective limitations, a more comprehensive theoretical framework is required that can adequately capture the interplay between structure and agency within CICs while being able to facilitate empirically validated analysis.

3.1.3. The Case for Structuration Theory

Given the aforementioned limitations, this study adopts ST owing to its empirically validated capacity to explain the recursive interplay between structure and agency (Archer, 1995; Stones, 2005). Giddens' (1984) original rendition of the theory, while conceptually grounded, however presents significant limitations that have hindered its empirical application in entrepreneurship research. For example, the theory suffers from methodological abstractness, with core concepts like the duality of structure remaining at such a high level of generality that empirical utility proves difficult for researchers, leading to accusations that ST is more a philosophical framework than a practical research tool (Stones, 2005). Furthermore, Giddens' treatment of agency as largely knowledgeable and reflexive underestimates the role habitual practices, and psychologically embedded dispositions that shape entrepreneurial action (Mouzelis, 2008).

Moreover, the theory's emphasis on the recursive reproduction of social systems leans towards structural determinism in practice, with insufficient attention given to how agents can generate

ingenuity or break from the status quo (Stones, 2005). This represents a significant limitation when examining entrepreneurship in constrained contexts where transformation, not just reproduction, may become apparent. Additionally, Giddens version of the theory offers limited methodological guidance, thus leaving researchers uncertain about how to trace the mechanisms through which structures enable and constrain agency over time (Stones, 2005).

Stones' (2005) Strong Structuration Theory (SST) however directly addresses these limitations while retaining ST's core tenets about the recursive structure-agency relationship. SST provides a more granular analytical framework through four key concepts: external structures (i.e. position-practice relations independent of the agent), internal structures (i.e. agents' knowledge, dispositions, and schemas), active agency (i.e. agents' strategic conduct), and outcomes (i.e. intended and unintended consequences) (Kennedy et al., 2021). This quadripartite framework offers empirical entry points for analysis that Giddens' original formulation lacked, thus enabling researchers to systematically examine how agents' knowledge of and orientation toward external structures shapes their strategic actions.

SST also introduces the concept of conjuncturally-specific internal structures, recognising that agents' dispositions and knowledge are context-dependent rather than universal, making it particularly pertinent for understanding how refugee entrepreneurs' prior experiences and current positions within camp hierarchies for example shape their agency. Furthermore, SST's distinction between general dispositional frames (i.e. past experiences) and conjunctural knowledge (i.e. situation-specific understanding) provides analytical tools for examining how agents draw upon pre-displacement experiences applying them to radically different institutional environments such as refugee camps. Notably, SST's emphasis on position-practice relations offers a framework for analysing power dynamics, acknowledging that agents occupy differential positions within social systems (Kholeif and Jack, 2018), a dimension essential for understanding entrepreneurship in refugee camps where hierarchies, gatekeepers, and institutional actors ostensibly play an important role in shaping refugee agency.

In sum, SST provides the analytical aptness to examine entrepreneurship under conditions of extreme constraint. Its ability to capture the idiosyncrasies of agency in CICs, including extreme structural constraints, temporal and collective forms of agency, survival-based entrepreneurship, makes it particularly suited to refugee camp settings. Despite recent applications of SST in constrained entrepreneurship research (Elkafrawi et al., 2022; Refai et al., 2024), the framework remains underrepresented in RE scholarship. This study therefore

contributes to addressing this gap by applying SST to examine how refugee entrepreneurs exercise agency within the multiple structural layers that enable or constrain their venture creation efforts. Before presenting this study's theoretical and empirical framework, the following section reviews key applications of ST across diverse disciplines and contexts to demonstrate the framework's analytical utility.

3.2. Structuration Theory: A Review

This section synthesises nine key studies that employ ST as their theoretical foundation, spanning diverse disciplines and empirical contexts. These nine studies (Table 4, page X) were identified through a systematic search of academic databases using keywords such as 'structuration theory,' 'strong structuration theory,' combined with terms such as 'entrepreneurship,' 'management,' and 'empirical research'. The search focused on peer-reviewed empirical studies published between 2005-2025 that explicitly employed either Giddens' (1984) original structuration theory or Stones' (2005) Strong Structuration Theory (SST) as their primary theoretical framework.

While some of the selected studies adhere to Giddens' original conception, the majority embrace Stones' refined adaptation, SST. These studies demonstrate the theoretical framework's utility across education, energy, accounting and management, and entrepreneurship domains. The following table consolidates these diverse applications, highlighting how SST's core concepts, namely the quadripartite framework, and methodological bracketing, have been utilised to explicate complex social phenomena across varied institutional and geographical contexts.

Author, Year	Research Field	Study Focus	Methodology	Key Concepts Applied	Key Findings
Kennedy-Reid (2014)	Education	Transformative learning conceptualisation	Conference paper/theoretical	SST duality of structure, internal-external structure coevolution	Personal introspection and societal impact are intertwined; duality supports transformative learning theory
Coad and Glyptis (2014)	Oil & Gas Industry	Joint venture controlling dynamics	Illustrative case study (Greek-South American partnership)	Position-practices (actions, positioning, capabilities, trust), temporal-spatial contexts	Trust complexity mediates contradictory structures; active agency establishes new practices; power imbalances identified
Feeney and Pierce (2016)	Oil & Gas Industry / Manufacturing	New product development processes	Case study of Magma Panel Products (6 interviews, document analysis)	Four-step methodological bracketing, conduct-context analysis	Agent information use influenced by subjective dispositions and objective external constructs; sequential composite methodology developed
Jack and Kholeif (2007)	Accounting & Management	IT and accounting systems implementation	Retrospective analysis of two case studies (secondary data)	Quadripartite nature (external structures, internal structures, active agency, outcomes)	SST bridges gap between abstract theory and empirical application; meso-level ontology fills void between constructs and phenomena
Kholeif and Jack (2018)	Accounting & Management	Embedded agency in change-averse settings	Case study of Egyptian sales tax department (interviews, observation, document analysis)	Quadripartite framework, position-practice analysis, methodological bracketing	Embedded agents (middle managers) advocate for change but external regulatory systems stifle change agency
Kennedy et al. (2021)	Management (Software SME)	Management actions impact on operational practices	Case study of Epsilon (Ireland-UK-US operations) - semi-structured interviews	Four-step bracketing approach, agent-in-focus analysis	SST useful for understanding agent conduct, resistance to change, and proactivity within networks

Tlaiss and McAdam (2021)	Entrepreneurship & Religion	Intersection of Islam and female entrepreneurship	Qualitative interpretative study (21 female entrepreneurs in Lebanon)	Giddens' structure-agency interactions, recursive relationships	Religious interpretations enable agents to challenge social constraints; reciprocal relationship between social structures and entrepreneurial agency
Elkafrawi et al. (2022)	Rural Entrepreneurship	Rural entrepreneurship in constrained settings	Single qualitative case study of women entrepreneur in Sweden	Quadripartite framework , Contextualised agency, gendered-local agency, context-specific filter	Agency is contextually moulded; entrepreneurship drives rural development through transformative phases; rural context filters agency into deliberate/accidental acts
Refai et al. (2024)	Constrained/Rural Entrepreneurship	Examines how rural entrepreneurs circumvent challenges in resource-constrained contexts	Single qualitative case study: Desertrtulip company and the Groasis Waterboxx-Technology in Jordan	Position-practice perspective from SST; Four interrelated elements: praxis, positioning, capabilities, and trust	Reframes Position-Practice around collective social systems rather than individual entrepreneurs; rural entrepreneurs act collectively with accountability to achieve sustainable development despite constraints

Table 4: Extant scholarship that adopts Strong Structuration Theory principles (2005–2025)

3.2.1. Limitations of Extant Applications

The studies reviewed in Table 4 demonstrate SST's robust analytical capacity across diverse empirical contexts, from established organisational settings to constrained entrepreneurial environments. Notably, six studies employed Stones' refined SST framework, emphasising the quadripartite structure and methodological bracketing, while three utilised Giddens' original conception. While the entrepreneurship applications (Elkafrawi et al., 2022; Refai et al., 2024; Tlaiss and McAdam, 2021) show how agents contend with structural constraints through collective agency, religious interpretation, and innovative practices, the limited application of SST to entrepreneurship scholarship remains evident.

Methodologically, entrepreneurship studies exhibit significant limitations, particularly the predominant reliance on single case study designs which restricts transferability and limits the potential for comparative analysis. Refai et al. (2024) highlight these limitations through their examination of rural entrepreneurship in Jordan. While the authors justify their utility of a single case approach by citing Yin's (2014) criterion for unique or atypical examples, their reliance on a European entrepreneur operating within Jordan's institutional environment raises questions about the case's representativeness of entrepreneurial agency under severe resource constraints. For example, the study's focalised agent possessed Western education, business networks, and financial resources to acquire exclusive technology rights. This contrasts sharply with refugee entrepreneurs who lack such resources, face legal restrictions on business formation, and operate under severe constraints.

Similarly, the constrained context exemplar relating to Elkafrawi et al. (2022) study focuses exclusively on a Global North setting (i.e. rural Sweden), which may not adequately represent the structural constraints faced by entrepreneurs in developing nations or extreme institutional environments. This Global North bias, combined with the absence of comparative research designs, limits theoretical understanding of how SST operates across different constraint contexts and prevents the identification of variation in agent-structure dynamics. These methodological and contextual limitations underscore the need for comparative SST applications in more CICs. Routinely, a comparative case study approach would enable the examination of how different constraint configurations may shape agent-structure interactions in similar contexts, thus potentially separating the heterogeneity of entrepreneurial agency while also advancing SST's theoretical development through cross-case analysis. To date, SST

has not been subjected to comparative case study analysis across different institutional contexts in any research discipline, representing a significant methodological gap in both structuration scholarship and entrepreneurship research.

3.3. Applying the Framework

This research examines three interconnected constructs that frame the investigation into RE within a CIC: refugee camps as a representation of a constrained institutional context, the refugee as the agent-in-focus, and entrepreneurship as the mode of agency under enquiry. Thus, by focusing on refugees as agents and entrepreneurship as an index of their agency, this research attempts to understand how hostile institutional environments can influence human behaviour, and inversely, how human action can transform these contexts over time. Before examining this proposition, it is necessary to explicate the study's overarching theoretical and empirical framework. Figure 3 presents the study's *key constructs*, which are underpinned by a two-fold approach to theorisation: (a) *conceptual development*, followed by (b) *empirical application*.

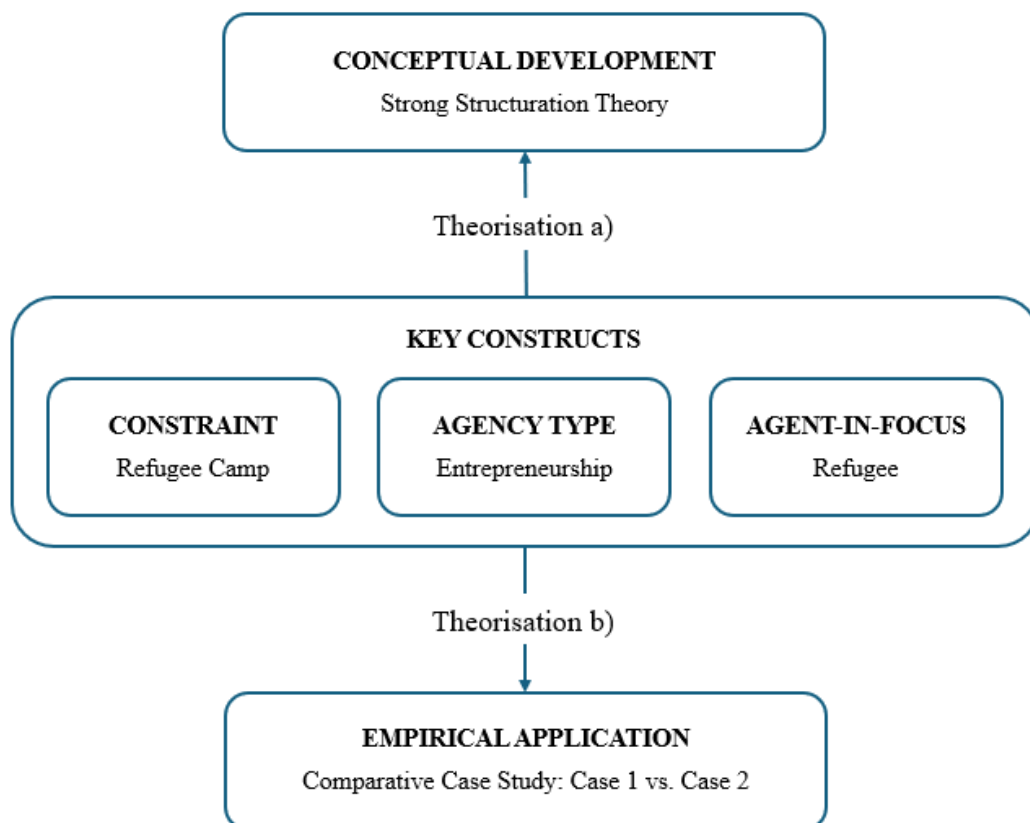


Figure 3: Theoretical & empirical framework

3.3.1. Key Constructs

3.3.1.1. *Refugee Camps as Constrained Institutional Contexts*

The study of refugee camps epitomises what a ‘extreme’ case is (Stones, 2005, p.89), contexts whereby structural constraints are characterised by uncertainty, blocked mobility, and severely limited access to capital (Betts et al., 2015; Turner, 2020). While all entrepreneurship faces some form of constraint, refugee camps present diverse and challenging structures relative to other contexts or other positions in contexts that constrain the ability of entrepreneurs to act.

These constraints exhibit through restrictive external structures including noticeable limitations on work permits, mobility restrictions, limited access to formal financial systems, and uncertainty regarding residency status (Shepherd et al., 2020). Such conditions invariably create significant barriers for entrepreneurial agency compared to constraints faced by entrepreneurs in more free and normative institutional environments.

3.3.1.2. *Refugees as Focalised Agents*

SST's analytical strength lies in not merely reducing agents to either cultural dopes, passive agents who lack creativity and subsequent agency (i.e. overly determined by external structures) or complete voluntarists, those who have complete freedom from social structures and constraints (i.e. disconnected from structural conditions) (Pozzebon, 2004). Thus, conceptualising refugees as the agents-in-focus (Stones, 2005) for this study therefore requires the researcher to acknowledge both their capacity for strategic action and the complex ways camp structures enable or constrain this very capacity. SST allows the researcher to draw attention to how refugees' internal structures, namely their general dispositional schemas, encompassing their pre-displacement experiences, educational backgrounds, and social networks, interact with their external and concrete surroundings to enable specific forms of agency (Greenhalgh and Stones, 2010).

Recent RE scholarship increasingly explores refugees as agents capable of exemplifying change agency, though empirical investigations remain limited. Chitac et al. (2025) provide rare empirical evidence from 13 Ukrainian women refugee entrepreneurs in the UK and Romania, demonstrating how they enact different forms of power to overcome institutional constraints and navigate intersectional identities as mothers, refugees, Ukrainians, and

entrepreneurs. However, theoretical developments appear to have outpaced empirical applications of late. For example, Khademi et al. (2024) developed an intersectional mixed-embeddedness framework incorporating agentic strategies as mechanisms through which refugees exercise agency and potentially transform structural constraints, while Refai and McElwee (2023) earlier conceptualised RE through the notion of subentrepreneurship, thereby emphasising how refugees exercise constrained yet transformative agency within subordinate structural positions. Neither framework has been empirically applied, again underscoring how conceptual development has seemingly outstripped empirical investigations of refugee entrepreneurial agency in practice.

3.3.1.3. Entrepreneurship as Agency

Recent and prominent scholarship posits entrepreneurial action as an index of human agency requiring structural transformation through individual and collective action (McMullen et al., 2021). Refugee camps are characterised by protracted displacement, restricted mobility, and regulatory constraints. Within such environments, entrepreneurship becomes a particularly pertinent example of projective agency (Emirbayer and Mische, 1998) - forward-looking action undertaken despite structural barriers. This projective dimension connects directly to what Stones (2005) terms conjuncturally specific internal structures: contextually situated knowledge, dispositions, and capabilities that agents mobilise in the here-and-now. Importantly, entrepreneurial action in camps extends beyond individual survival strategies to encompass collective forms addressing community needs and challenging institutional barriers, providing a prime site for examining both the projective and collective dimensions of agency under-theorised in RE literature (Refai and McElwee, 2023).

Stones's (2005) quadripartite framework essentially posits that outcomes serve as the conduit through which transformation or reproduction occurs within both external structures and internal agent dispositions. Thus, both intended and unintended outcomes can lead to changes in external 'hardware' social structures and internal 'software' agent dispositions, with each dimension potentially shaping the other. Syrian refugee entrepreneurs in Lebanon exemplify this interplay through what Fathallah et al. (2024) term entrepreneurial limbo, a state of continual precarity where the future remains unknown. Using a grounded theory approach, Fathallah et al. (2024) shows how refugee entrepreneurs reframe their venturing activities temporally and geographically, thus enabling persistence despite disruption. The authors

identify three dynamic processes: idling (i.e. day-to-day survival), fixing (i.e. attempting local integration), and porting (i.e. preparing ventures for relocation). These patterns demonstrate how agents iteratively reinterpret external shocks and update cognitive schemas and behavioural strategies in response to shifting constraints. This finding, while derived from a grounded theory approach, resonates with SST's emphasis on agency as an ongoing process wherein entrepreneurs actively shape and are shaped by their precarious circumstances.

While existing research recognises refugee agency in response to external constraints, empirical studies that specifically examine how refugees enact collective entrepreneurial action within CICs, particularly through organised, community-level interventions, remain scant. Moreover, where such studies exist, there are clear variations in theoretical and methodological application. Within RE scholarship, this structural-agentic interplay has been largely overlooked, with literature emphasising either constraints or agency in isolation (Abebe, 2023; Desai et al., 2021; Lang et al., 2024). For instance, while Fathallah et al. (2024) employed grounded theory to inductively show dynamic agency-structure interactions, their focus remained on individual-level adaptive strategies rather than collective action or intentional structural transformation. Therefore, this study employs SST to explicitly examine how refugee entrepreneurs exercise both individual and collective agency, with particular attention to organised interventions aimed at structural transformation.

3.3.2. Theorisation (a): SST and Methodological Bracketing

3.3.2.1. Strong Structuration Theory

The first pathway develops the theoretical proposition by using the quadripartite frame of structuration theory (Stones, 2005). This framework is bifunctional, serving as both a theoretical lens and providing its own analytical approach known as methodological bracketing (Elkafrawi et al., 2022; Kholeif and Jack, 2018). While Giddens (1984) initially introduced methodological bracketing through institutional analysis and strategic conduct analysis, Stones operationalised this concept by replacing institutional analysis with context analysis and refining the treatment of conduct analysis. This approach employs analytical dualism as a practical research strategy, thus making ST more empirically user-friendly. Stones further refines ST through a four-part reciprocal process: external structures, internal structures, active agency, and outcomes, as depicted in Figure 4. This framework maintains the ontological

commitment to the duality of structure, yet provides the analytical separation required to perform empirical research through context and conduct analysis.

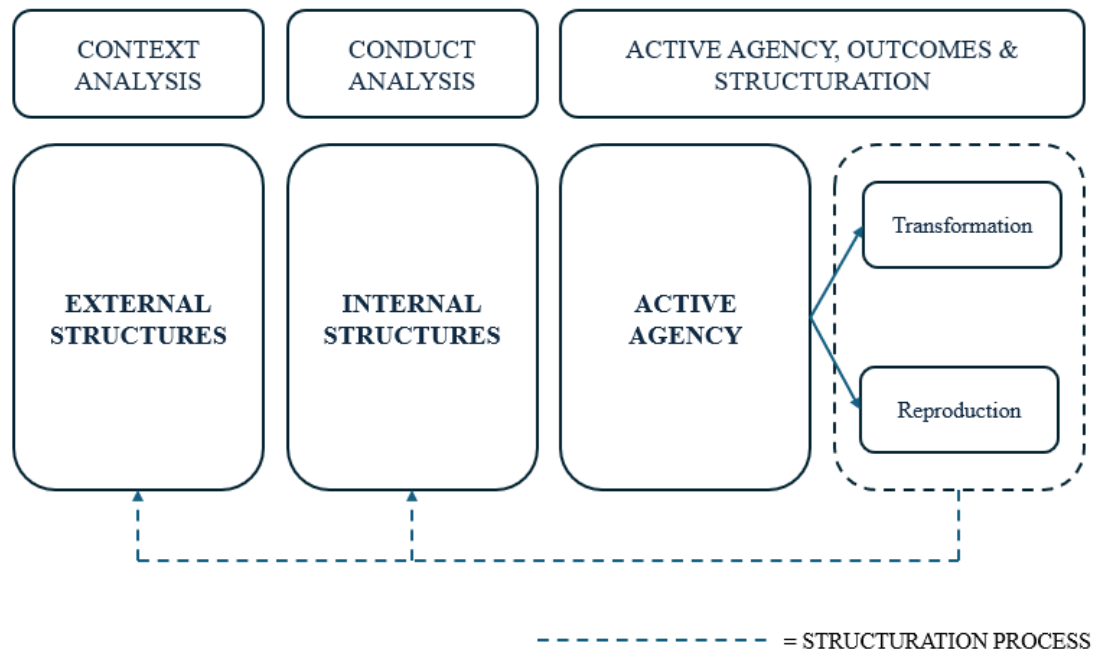


Figure 4: Strong Structuration Theory (Kennedy et al 2021)

According to Stones (2005), external structures represent how agents or researchers perceive the context where action takes place, while the notion of internal structures embodies the dispositional and conjunctural schemas which may predict how the agent may react in a given situation. In other words, agents will draw upon their past experiences (i.e. general dispositional frame) to assess the present (i.e. conjectural-specific frame) thereby leading to action potential (future). Thereafter, active agency ordinarily takes place, which according to Stones, can manifest in two ways: intentional action or unintentional action. In similar vein, outcomes may be conceptualised as both intended or unintended, thus agents may succeed or fail in their actions, potentially leading to structures being reproduced or transformed over time (Stones, 2005). However as earlier cited, Stones's rendition of the theory posits that transformation, or reproduction occurs at both external and internal structures as depicted in the above illustration.

Recent debates in SST scholarship have further developed this view by emphasising how agency itself is contextualised. Elkafrawi et al. (2022) demonstrate that agency is not merely a property of agents but is intertwined with both internal structures and external contextual norms and resources. The authors concept of gendered-local agency essentially shows how agency

becomes simultaneously enabled and constrained through context-specific interplay, thus extending Stones' (2005) framework by positioning agency as itself contextualised within the structures that entrepreneurs attempt to challenge.

3.3.2.2. Methodological Bracketing: Context-Conduct Analysis

Context analysis involves understanding how agents operate within their external structural terrain (Stones, 2005). Elkafrawi et al.'s (2022) study of a rural woman entrepreneur in Sweden demonstrates the use of context analysis across multiple levels: macro (societal gender norms), meso (local community networks), and micro (specific position-practice relations). In their study the authors distinguished between constraining structures (patriarchal norms restricting women's entry into the trade of shoeing horses) and enabling structures (geographic proximity to suppliers thus reducing costs, supportive women's entrepreneurship networks). This distinction is highly relevant as it moves beyond deterministic views of structure as limiting, thus showing how entrepreneurs leverage enabling structures to dampen such constraints, a dynamic particularly pertinent in refugee camp settings where severe restrictions must coexist with entrepreneurial opportunities.

For the study of RCE, this approach positions refugee camps as complex external structures operating across distinct yet interconnective dimensions: i) physical constraints - barriers, checkpoints, and spatially confined marketplaces that restrict mobility; ii) regulatory frameworks - host nation policies governing work rights, business registration, and NGO administrative arrangements controlling resource distribution for example; and iii) social dynamics - asymmetrical power relations between camp authorities, humanitarian organisations, host communities, and refugee populations themselves. Like in Elkafrawi et al.'s (2022) study, these external structures can operate as both constraints (i.e. movement restrictions limiting market access, legal prohibitions on formal business registration) and enabling examples (i.e. concentrated customer bases within camps, informal networks facilitating cross-border trade), thereby requiring analysis of how they can potentially shape entrepreneurial possibilities at macro (national refugee policies), meso (camp governance systems), and individual/collective levels (daily market interactions) for example.

Conduct analysis on the other hand examines agents' internal structures, thus the knowledge, dispositions, and interpretative frames which guide action (Stones, 2005). Conjuncturally-

specific structures serve as the 'connective tissue' (Figure 5) between agents' general dispositions and their surrounding external terrain (Kennedy et al., 2021, p. 436). This dual-level analysis is particularly important as it explains why agents experiencing similar external conditions may act differently and achieve varying outcomes. Their internal structures mediate how they interpret and respond to structural constraints, accounting for entrepreneurial variation even within seemingly identical camp contexts.

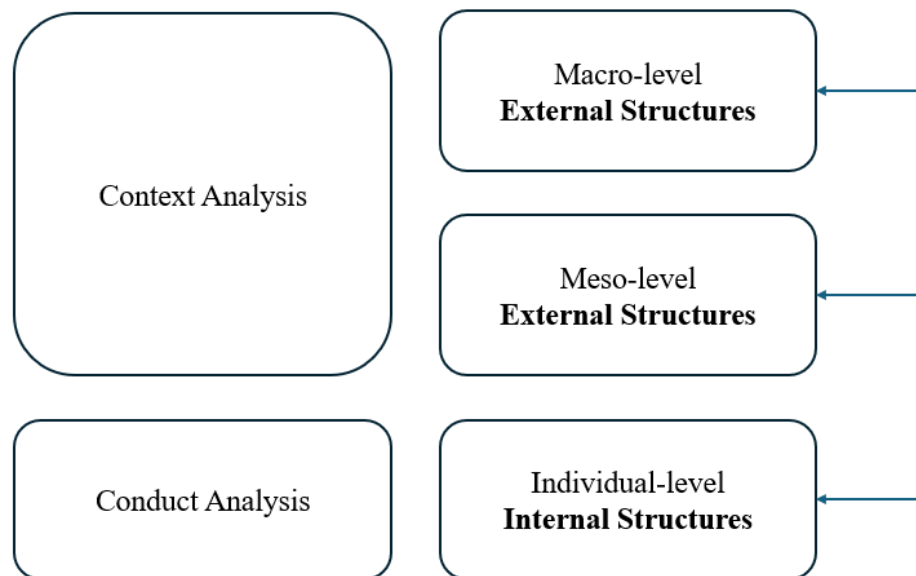


Figure 5: The relationship between Context-Conduct Analysis (Kennedy-Reid 2014)

For RCE, conduct analysis should therefore capture the interplay between refugees' pre-displacement habitus and their current predicament of encampment. Invariably, general dispositions will encompass habitus carried from pre-displacement lives in Syria, such as their professional qualifications (e.g. teachers, skilled tradespeople), relevant entrepreneurial expertise from previous ventures for example, and cultural capital including communication skills and other competencies rooted in Syrian traditions. Conjuncturally-specific knowledge reflects refugees' situated understanding of camp life. For instance, the holding of multiple camp jobs or ventures, identifying entrepreneurial opportunities, recognising power dynamics between authorities and refugee communities, mapping informal markets and trust-based networks. This therefore represents learning-on-the-go, such as operating businesses without legal registration, leveraging humanitarian presence as a supplementary customer base, or transforming aid materials into cash. In sum, the analytical task entails the researcher to

examine how pre-displacement habitus intersects with camp-specific knowledge to shape entrepreneurial agency under constraint.

Overall, Stones' (2005) methodological bracketing allows analytical focus on either structural context or agent conduct without collapsing one into the other. Thus, by bracketing conduct and context, the approach facilitates focused examination of one aspect before integrating them to understand their interplay. This maintains the duality of structure and agency throughout the analysis rather than treating them as separate or reducing one to the other (Kennedy et al., 2021).

3.3.3. Theorisation (b): The Empirics of Comparative Case Analysis

The second theoretical pathway grounds these conceptual propositions through a comparative case study of two Syrian refugee camps in Jordan: the Zaatari and Azraq refugee camps. Following the approach of examining cases with common antecedents yet differing outcomes (Eisenhardt, 2021), this empirical investigation explores how the theoretical relationships identified through methodological bracketing manifest across different camp contexts. The comparative analysis employs two interconnected analytical procedures: applying replication logic (Yin, 2009) and cross-case analysis (Eisenhardt, 2021).

Replication logic involves analysing each case as a separate entity rather than consolidating cases for statistical purposes (Yin, 1984). This qualitative approach emphasises individuality as the methodological unit of analysis, facilitating nuanced understanding through varied settings and contextually refined data. The objective is determining whether insights from one case can be extended or replicated across another. If theory proves consistent across cases, this augments prospects for transferability to analogous cases. Furthermore, replication logic also guides case selection as theoretical samples are selected to either elucidate similar results (literal replication) or highlight anomalies (theoretical replication) (Yin, 2009). Consistent with retroductive logic in critical realism (Bhaskar, 1989), this study begins with observable outcomes, thus notable differences in operational businesses across camps (Zaatari: 1,800; Azraq: 390), and works backward to identify the underlying structural mechanisms producing these divergent results. This outcome-focused starting point within the SST framework justifies their selection as the theoretical sample. In the scenario of homogeneous findings across cases,

this reinforces framework efficacy, while heterogeneous findings necessitate theoretical refinement, thus leading to new theorisation (Eisenhardt, 2021; Whetten, 1989).

Cross-case analysis examines similarities, deviations, and patterns across multiple cases (Eisenhardt, 2021). This serves two purposes: first, facilitating reliability through consistency, thereby enhancing research conclusions; and second, promoting analytical creativity through comparison, enabling researchers to deliberate alternate explanations and accentuate novel insights not ordinarily present in single case studies. Having comparative benchmarks rather than isolated reference points thus alleviates risks of weak inferences and poor theorisation (Eisenhardt, 2021). This approach enables nuanced comprehension of context-specific dynamics within extreme contexts, contributing to holistic understanding of complex social phenomena. Analytical tools including pattern pairing and explanation expansion help develop theoretical frameworks (Eisenhardt, 2021). These techniques identify key themes elucidating why certain findings occur across contexts, enabling researchers to move beyond descriptive accounts toward explanatory theorisation. Through this iterative process, findings become more conceptually grounded, ensuring that theoretical propositions remain connected to the lived realities of RE.

In sum, the bidirectional arrows in the theoretical framework indicate an iterative relationship between conceptual and empirical theorisation. The methodological bracketing in pathway (a) informs the comparative case design, while empirical findings from pathway (b) feed-back to refine the conceptual understanding of structure-agency dynamics. This two-fold approach ensures that the investigation remains both theoretically robust through SST's analytical framework and empirically grounded through the empirical comparison of real-world refugee camp contexts.

3.4. Chapter Summary

In sum, this chapter synthesises four interconnected bodies of scholarship to develop a comprehensive theoretical framework for examining RE within CICs. The RE literature distinguishes refugees from voluntary migrants across departure circumstances, resource access, and psychological barriers, illustrating multilevel impacts on host societies while examining how institutional structures both constrain and enable entrepreneurial activity. However, the field exhibits pronounced geographic bias toward Global North exemplars, relies heavily on single-case qualitative studies, and suffers from theoretical fragmentation between structural determinism and methodological individualism. Constrained institutional entrepreneurship literature across global regions accentuates distinct patterns: accommodative strategies in the Global North, exploitative approaches in the Global South, and institutional resistance in the Middle East, demonstrating how constraint severity shapes entrepreneurial responses.

Entrepreneurial agency theory explores the structure-agency interplay through temporal dimensions and collective forms of agency embedded in social networks. Contemporary frameworks show limitations for severely constrained contexts, while SST applications across diverse disciplines demonstrate analytical utility through the quadripartite framework and methodological bracketing. Despite this, entrepreneurship applications remain limited on the whole, and in particular, in CICs. The theoretical framework positions refugee camps as CICs, refugees as focalised agents, and entrepreneurship as the mode of agency under examination, with SST providing the theoretical lens for investigating the reciprocal relationship between refugee agents and constrained social structures through comparative examination of separate, yet analogous camp contexts.

The subsequent chapter turns to the empirical landscape, examining the host nation of Jordan and the theoretical sample of the Zaatari and Azraq refugee camps in more depth. This contextual analysis provides the background for understanding the specific institutional constraints and structural conditions within which refugee entrepreneurs exercise agency, thus setting the stage for the comparative case study approach.

CHAPTER 4: METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

4.0. Introduction

Following the empirical context outlined in the previous chapter, this chapter presents the study's methodological framework organised around four key dimensions: philosophical, methodological, methodical, and analytical. The philosophical dimension discusses the critical realist underpinnings and its relationship to Structuration Theory. The methodological dimension frames the qualitative research approach, the use of a pilot study in Calais and Dunkirk refugee settlements (France), and the comparative case study design employed across the main theoretical sample: Zaatari and Azraq refugee camps (Jordan). The methodical dimension outlines data collection techniques including naturalistic data, researcher observation, and semi-structured interviews. The analytical dimension presents the use of data structuring templates within the frame of context-conduct analysis. Figure 7 illustrates this methodological framework in practice.

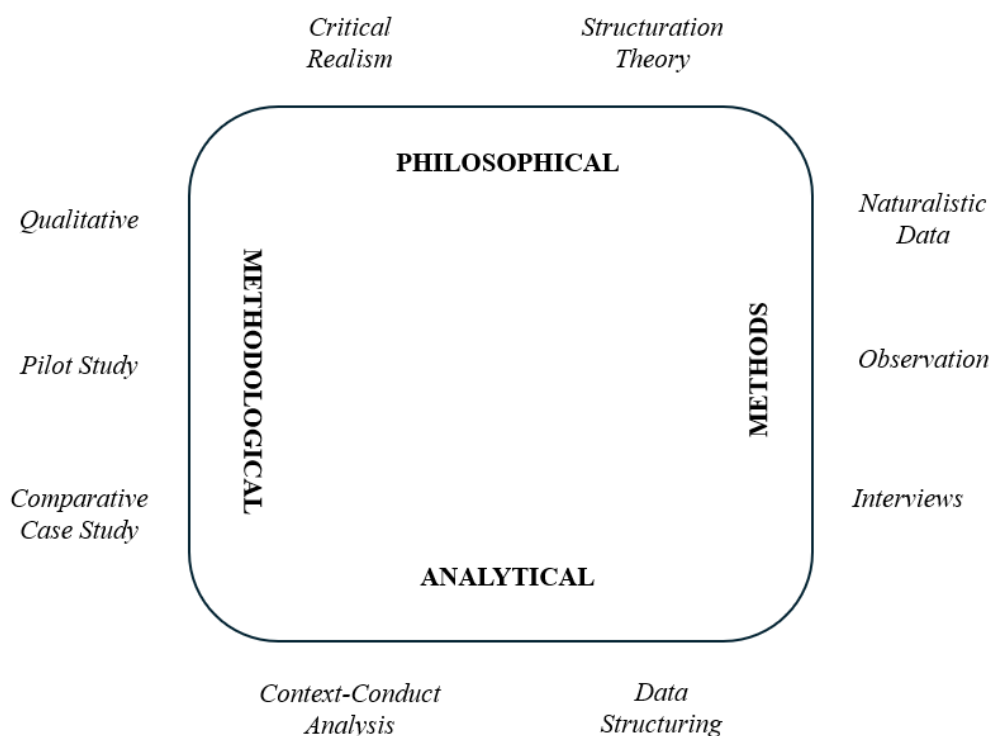


Figure 6: Four-dimensional methodological framework (adapted from Nicholson et al 2014)

4.1. PHILOSOPHICAL DIMENSION

4.1.1. *Critical Realism*

The social sciences have long debated the primacy of structure over agency and vice versa, a debate rooted in ontological assumptions (Wimalasena et al., 2021). These assumptions exist on a continuum from objective to subjective (Mole and Mole, 2008). Positivists view social phenomena as objective external facts that enable and constrain behaviour, prioritising macro-level structural forces over individual agency (Bryman, 2012). Conversely, social constructivists emphasise how social reality emerges through human interaction and shared meanings, viewing structure and agency as interdependent rather than hierarchical (Burr, 2015). Critical realism (CR) mediates between these positions, treating agency and structure as mutually constitutive rather than opposing forces (Bhaskar, 1989). CR maintains a realistic ontology while acknowledging that institutions can influence individual actions and individuals possess causal power to shape constraining structures (Neergaard and Ulhøi, 2007). This non-deterministic relationship positions CR as particularly pertinent to entrepreneurship scholarship (Packard, 2017).

CR's distinctive contribution lies in its stratified model of reality comprising three interconnected levels: the real level, the actual level and the empirical level (Bhaskar, 1989; Archer, 1995). This stratification can be conceptualised as an iceberg, where observable phenomena represent the visible tip above water, while deeper causal mechanisms lie beneath the surface (Fletcher, 2017). The *real level* encompasses underlying mechanisms and generative structures, such as institutional frameworks, economic configurations, social networks, and cultural attitudes for example, that possess causal powers to enable or constrain action. The *actual level* comprises events and processes that occur whether observed or not, including business formation, integration processes, and institutional interactions. The *empirical level* consists of observable phenomena such as business registrations, documented practices, and policy outcomes. This stratification thus facilitates the research strategy of retrodution: working backward from observed phenomena to theorise the underlying mechanisms generating these outcomes (Bhaskar, 1979).

Applied to the study of RE, this approach points to how observable business activities (empirical) surface from processes of resource mobilisation and community support (actual),

which are themselves shaped by deeper institutional, economic, and social structures (real). When integrated with ST, this approach provides useful analytical utility for the researcher. ST's concept of the duality of structure recognises that refugee entrepreneurs simultaneously draw upon and transform existing structures through their practices. For instance, the regular occurrence of small boat crossings across the English Channel prompted significant UK policy reforms, such as the Rwanda deportation scheme and, following its abandonment, the introduction of a 'one in, one out' asylum policy, thereby exemplifying how institutional structures are continuously reproduced or transformed through refugee agency and collective action.

This integration of CR's stratified ontology with ST provides a useful framework for understanding the complexity of RE in CICs. It acknowledges multiple levels of reality, thereby aiding causal explanation beyond mere description, whilst capturing the dynamic nature of structure-agency relationships. Moreover, this approach informs interventions by potentially revealing root-cause mechanisms rather than surface level indicators (Fletcher, 2017). Consequently, this study adopts CR in conjunction with ST due to their inherent synergies, compatibility and application within extant structuration literature (Kholeif and Jack, 2018).

4.1.2. Structuration Theory

ST posits that understanding social action requires exploring the interplay between structural and agency-centred theories, as neither alone provides comprehensive understanding (Nicholson et al., 2014). This opposition mirrors the parallel tension between structural determinism and agency-centred voluntarism (Whittington, 1988). Ultimately, the notion of structural determinism takes two forms: environmental determinism and action determinism (Pozzebon, 2004).

As the typology suggests, environmental determinism posits the view that human behaviour is predominately shaped by the physical environment, with human responses determined by terrain, and available resources. Action determinism on the other hand proposes that outcomes are in part determined by agents' inherent preferences and dispositions, thus acknowledging both internal factors (genetic impulses, habitus) and external factors (social norms) as causal forces. However, the notion of action determinism differs from voluntary action, which proposes the element of intentional choice based on individuals' knowledge, beliefs, and desires

rather than exclusive determination by external structures (Pozzebon, 2004). Yet the concept of voluntary action, remains limited to the individual level (Nicholson et al., 2014). Thus, social action extends this dimension to encompass collective agency, where individuals and groups both shape and are shaped by their positions and roles within societal structures (Whittington, 1988). ST is philosophically positioned at the nexus between voluntary and social action (Figure 8), bridging the gap between social context and agency to understand both individual and collective behaviour (Bhaskar, 1989; Pozzebon, 2004). This intersection represents the optimal position for advancing ST (Nicholson et al., 2014).

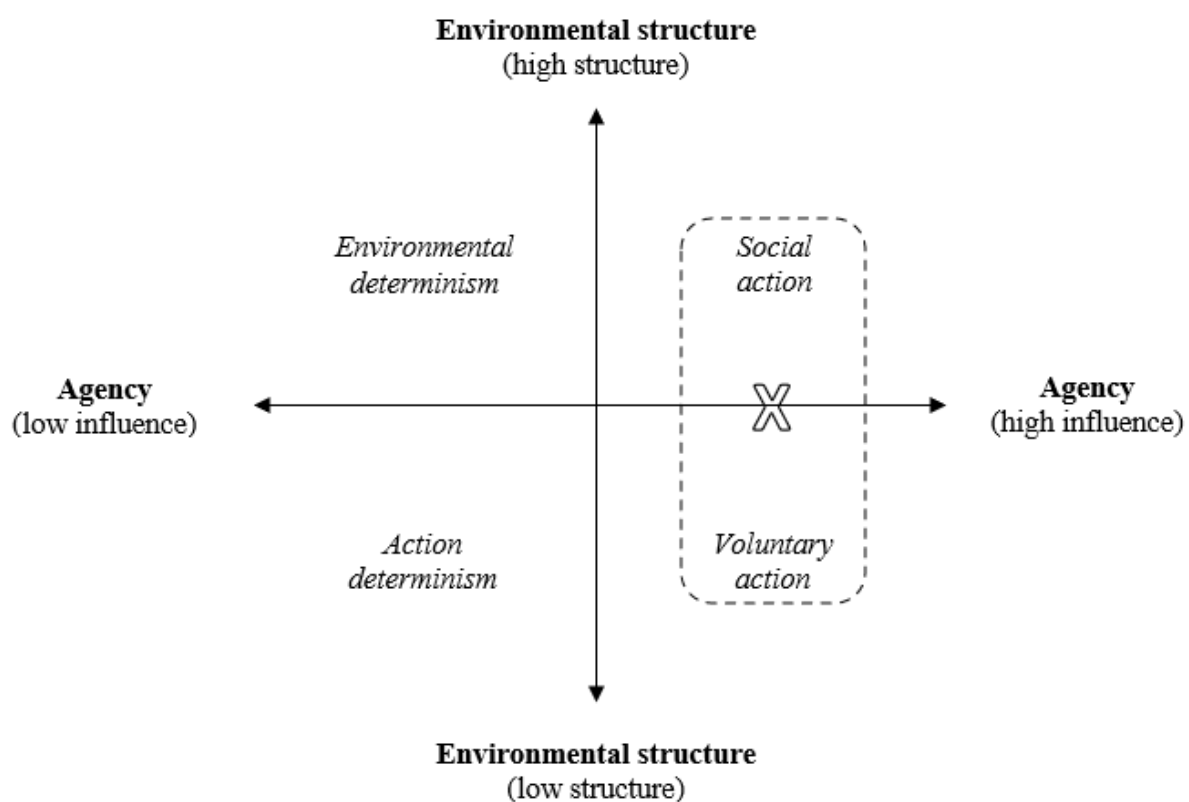


Figure 7: Positioning (X) structuration theory to advance its theorisation (Pozzebon 2004)

4.2. METHODOLOGICAL DIMENSION

4.2.1. Qualitative Approach

The relationship between quantitative and qualitative approaches in entrepreneurship research has evolved considerably, moving away from earlier paradigm debates toward a more pluralist

and pragmatic orientation (Saunders et al., 2009). Rather than representing competing epistemological camps, quantitative and qualitative methods are increasingly understood as complementary tools whose appropriateness depends on the nature of the research question, the level of analysis, and the contextual complexity of the phenomenon under investigation (Edmondson and McManus, 2007).

Qualitative approaches have gained particular traction in entrepreneurship scholarship precisely because of their capacity to capture the contextual, processual, and interpretive dimensions of entrepreneurial phenomena that quantitative designs are less equipped to address. Strategies such as grounded theory, phenomenology, ethnography, action research, and case studies exemplify the methodological range available within the qualitative tradition (Saunders et al., 2009), each offering distinct tools for illuminating how social and institutional structures shape individual and meso-level entrepreneurial action (Packard, 2017). Qualitative methods are especially effective in explicating the complexities of social phenomena within both natural and artificial contexts, helping to elucidate the perspectives of active participants (Neergaard and Ullhøi, 2007). Recent scholarship further highlights qualitative research's capacity to capture the contextual nature of entrepreneurship (Welter et al., 2019), particularly in settings where institutional complexity shapes entrepreneurial action in ways that resist quantification (van Burg et al., 2020).

For the purpose of this study, a qualitative approach proves particularly appropriate given the widespread application of qualitative methods to the field of RE (Abebe, 2023), and the necessity of understanding how refugee entrepreneurs negotiate and potentially transform the CICs they inhabit (Neergaard and Ullhøi, 2007). This decision was further influenced by the perceived challenges from the prospect of conducting fieldwork in refugee camp settings. Challenges such as being able to recruit a sufficient sample, coupled with the complexities of access and language barriers, ultimately led to this approach being implemented. Furthermore, refugees are a diverse and heterogeneous diaspora, therefore, the concept of recruiting mainly those who have a penchant for entrepreneurship ostensibly reduces the potential sample size even further. Moreover, qualitative procedures such as the use of interviews allow for the in-depth inquiry into individual refugee journeys (Dubow and Kuschminder, 2021). The nature of such journeys can often transform and reshape institutional contexts (Refai and McElwee, 2023).

Additionally, qualitative procedures, such as the use of case studies and researcher observation can further augment the research enquiry in several keyways. First, they offer more flexibility than nomological means (i.e., statistics), typically seen within the traditional quantitative/positivistic paradigm (Easterby-Smith et al., 2018). Second, they allow for the use of more diverse, inclusive, and naturalistic data sets such as the utility of images and videos captured from the research field (Ownby, 2017). Third, they enable in-depth, rich, and nuanced understanding of individual experiences and perspectives at an institutional level, thereby leading to novel theorisation and the potential for theory building (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011). Fourth, they provide contextual insight, again relevant for understanding the relationship between agency and structure, thus allowing comparisons to be drawn to analogous contexts (Sarason et al., 2010). Furthermore, they are well suited to answering research questions relating to complex social phenomena in depth, as they allow researchers to gather rich and nuanced data directly from the research context in question (Patton, 2014).

4.2.2. Pilot Study

Within the social sciences, the use of pilot studies typically serve two functions: as a 'test drive' of particular methods in the research field, or as miniature fieldwork analogous to feasibility studies (Malmqvist et al., 2019). According to van Teijlingen and Hundley (2001), pilot studies help actualise empirical pitfalls, thus serving as a developmental exercise for researchers. They enable methodical refinement of data collection and analysis procedures in abbreviated form, allowing procedural corrections based on tentative method performance (Malmqvist et al., 2019). Furthermore, pilot phases permit researchers to re-evaluate interview protocols whilst assessing time requirements and identifying observer bias that may compromise reliability and validity (Sampson, 2004). Overall, pilot studies add to the quality and strength of final research findings, contributing to methodological rigour.

For this study, the Calais and Dunkirk pilot yielded specific insights that informed the main fieldwork in Jordan. Conducting interviews with humanitarian stakeholders rather than refugees directly highlighted the value of triangulating multiple perspectives, a strategy subsequently employed across UNHCR representatives, camp guides, and translators in Zaatari and Azraq. The pilot further showed the importance of visual and observational data when direct access is constrained, leading to systematic integration of photographic documentation and audio fieldnotes. Additionally, the compressed five-day timeframe underscored the need

for efficient protocols suitable for UNHCR's restricted access windows, while exposing practical challenges including language barriers and ethical sensitivities that prompted arrangements for professional translation and explicit consent procedures in the main study.

4.2.2.1. Calais & Dunkirk Informal Settlements

Following ethical approval from the University of Leeds ethics committee, the study's principal investigator accessed three informal refugee settlements in the north of France through a UK charity. The charity provides direct aid to around one thousand refugees in the towns of Calais and Dunkirk. The majority of these refugees are homeless, often sleeping rough in hostile conditions. To compound matters, the French police, known locally as the '*gendarme*', regularly confiscate the possessions of refugees including sleeping bags and tents. The *gendarme* is a dedicated police unit aimed at preventing another 'Calais Jungle' from forming. The Calais Jungle was a makeshift informal settlement located in Calais, emerging in the early 2000's and was later dismantled by the French authorities in October 2016. While the physical camp no longer exists in its original form, its disbandment subsequently led to the formation of three fragmented settlements, known as the BMX camp, the Hospital camp, and the Dunkirk camp.



Figure 8: Pilot study living arrangements for researcher

I accessed these informal refugee settlements for the purpose of conducting a pilot study as a precursor to the main empirical study. Access was granted by the UK charity (gatekeeper) via email correspondence for a period of five days between the 24-28 July 2023. I was positioned at the charity's volunteer site and warehouse in Calais, whereby they were able to observe and participate in daily briefings, warehouse logistics, and aid rationing and distribution for daily camp visitation. Whilst full access was granted under the role of 'researcher', the organisation stipulated to the investigator the following conditions: refugee consent required for photographic images, charity anonymisation, and interviews permitted with humanitarian workers/volunteers only (i.e. direct interviews with refugees were not permitted by the charitable organisation under no circumstances).

Owing namely to the restrictions on interviewing refugees, I sought alternative ways to gain insight into the lived experiences of encamped refugees. Thus, acknowledging the importance of firsthand immersion in the research field (Neergaard and Ulhøi, 2007), I opted to reside in a tent at a public campsite in Calais for the duration of the fieldwork to acquaint themselves to analogous camp living (Figure 9). This simulated approach allowed me to engage with some of the physical, social, and emotional aspects associated with unconventional living, serving to offer insight and contextual understanding of agency as a proxy to interviewing refugees. Although artificial, this direct experience aimed at overcoming the methodological limitations associated with interview access, provided a nuanced and complementary perspective to the pilot study, thereby attempting to bridge the gap between the researcher and study participant (Neergaard and Ulhøi, 2007).

In sum, I was granted access to three informal settlements in the north of France, namely the BMX camp, the hospital camp, and the Dunkirk camp (Figure 10). I utilised both field notes and images to capture and observe refugee interactions and activities within the informal settlements. Whilst interviews with refugees were forbade by the organisation, I was permitted to interview charity volunteers to understand aspects of refugee agency within the settlements. In total, seven candidates were identified and approached by myself to determine their inclination to be interviewed on the basis of their experience volunteering in the settlements. I discussed the aim of the pilot study and provided each candidate with a participation information sheet (Appendix C) and a separate informed consent form (Appendix D). A total of five charity workers agreed to be interviewed and these were subsequently conducted over Microsoft Teams individually, lasting approximately 40-45 minutes each in the ensuing week

following the fieldwork trip. The use of remote interviewing practices enabled the automatic and straightforward transcription of the interviews in preparation for thematic coding and analysis.



Figure 9: (left-right) refugees performing bicycle repairs in the hospital camp, refugees performing haircuts in the Dunkirk camp, refugees playing football, refugee living arrangements in the BMX camp

Method	Description
<i>Interviews</i>	Semi-structured interviews (45min) conducted with 5 charity volunteers who each had experience volunteering in the informal settlements over the summer period. Interviews centred on aspects of refugee agency/entrepreneurship and were performed remotely. Interviews were automatically transcribed following each interview.
<i>Fieldnotes derived from observation</i>	The researcher utilised an audio application to document their experience in each of the camp settlements. The fieldnotes centred on aspects of refugee agency and incidents of entrepreneurship.
<i>Photographic images</i>	38 pictures were taken by the researcher. Visual analysis involved basic researcher interpretation of the images. Images supplemented the observational fieldnotes.

Table 5: Description of data collection methods used in pilot study

In addition, observational fieldnotes were also transcribed further being complemented by the use of visual analysis of photographic images. Table 5 (above) outlines the methods of data collection captured from the pilot study.

4.3. Main Study: The Host Nation of Jordan

4.3.1. Jordan

The refugee host nation of Jordan has been overwhelmingly shaped by migratory movements throughout its modern history. Since its establishment in 1946, the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan has received repeated waves of refugees, with Palestinian refugees constituting the largest diaspora, resulting in more than 10 Palestinian refugee camps dispersed across the nation (Al-Husseini, 2010). Given its complex history of managing large-scale refugee populations, Jordan opted not to sign the 1951 Geneva Refugee Convention, instead establishing a more flexible memorandum of understanding with the UNHCR, thus allowing for more context-specific approaches to refugee management (Al-Kilani, 2014).

When the Syrian civil war commenced in 2011, thousands of Syrians began seeking refuge across its border with Jordan, particularly in the northern regions. Since the onset of the war, Jordan has become home to the fifth largest refugee population relative to its own population worldwide and the third largest Syrian refugee population globally (only behind Turkey and Lebanon), comprising more than 643,000 individuals (European Commission, 2024). Initially, many refugee families found shelter among accepting Jordanian households with whom they shared historical ties that predated the colonial borders of 1946 (JRC & IFRC, 2012). However, as the diaspora intensified, it began straining the underdeveloped infrastructure in Jordan's northern areas, particularly the governorate of Mafraq. Whilst initially treated as guests, the Syrian newcomers were increasingly required to register as official refugees (JRC & IFRC, 2012). Over time, this shift was accompanied by mounting pressures between local Jordanians and Syrian refugees, thus leading to a growing consensus among the Jordanian populace that the Syrian refugees should be housed in interspersed camp settings (CSS, 2013).

Today, approximately 20% of registered Syrian refugees in Jordan reside in UNHCR-administered camps, including Zaatari, Azraq, the Emirati-Jordanian camp, and the Garden Park, with these facilities jointly managed by UNHCR and the Jordanian government through the SRAD (UNHCR, 2024). While most Syrian refugees continue to live in urban towns and

cities, the largest and most established camps, namely *Zaatari* and *Azraq*, serve as unique case studies for understanding entrepreneurship agency within CICs.



Figure 10: Map of Jordan showing the position of the Zaatari and Azraq refugee camps (adapted from the European Commission)

4.3.2. Zaatari Camp

The Zaatari camp opened under admittedly challenging circumstances, with humanitarian agencies allocated just 19 days to establish a refugee settlement in an empty field in the Mafraq governorate, some 10 kilometres away from the Jordanian-Syrian border (UNHCR, 2012a). Originally designed to house just 15,000 refugees (UNHCR, 2012b), the camp's capacity was quickly overwhelmed by the mass flood of refugees as the war intensified. Without time to implement a comprehensive plan, the camp's initial expansion was driven by refugees' own settlement practices rather than the standard formal planning procedures involved in the creation of such settlements (Davis, 2019). Humanitarian agencies, overwhelmed by the immediate need to provide essential services such as shelter and other essential infrastructure, had limited capacity to regulate how refugees organised their living and commercial spaces during this early period (UNHCR, 2014b). Shortly following this initial crisis period, camp planners attempted to apply the standard UNHCR emergency guidelines (UNHCR, 2007) to the spatial layout retrospectively. This effort, though ultimately futile, involved introducing a

grid system with designated districts, caravan blocks, and shared facilities. This rigid spatial architecture contrasted sharply with the organic settlement patterns that had already taken shape in the older sections of the camp, namely the market streets (Dalal et al., 2018).

However, this approach could not keep pace with the unstable population growth, which surged from 50,000 residents in January 2013 to over 200,000 by May the same year, an exponential rise in just four months. Zaatari's refugees were found to have reshaped their environment by relocating containers to create intimate family and commercial clusters, thereby reconstructing social and spatial arrangements that appeared to mimic their former communities in Syria (Dalal et al., 2018). Through this process, Zaatari evolved into one of Jordan's largest urban settlements (Beener, 2015; Weston, 2015), with its population stabilising at approximately 80,000 residents in subsequent years.

Both the UNHCR and the SRAD acknowledged the difficulty of enforcing its original vision in Zaatari and thus reluctantly endured the informal spatial practices that typified its unique city-like development (Davis, 2019). Zaatari's organic growth further led to subsequent policy shifts, namely UNHCR's 2014 Policy on Camp Alternatives (UNHCR, 2014), thus reflecting concerns about maintaining institutional authority within artificial settlements. The perceived chaos relating to its inception and lack of subsequent control thereafter predictably informed the decision to establish a sister camp: Azraq, one that would epitomise order, planning, and institutional authority from the onset.

4.3.3. Azraq Camp

Determined to avoid the lack of planning which characterised the case of Zaatari, the Jordanian government approved plans in March 2013 to commission the Azraq camp, situated in an empty desert quarter some 90 km away from the Jordanian-Syria border. While refugee arrivals had begun to curtail towards the latter part of 2013, the new camp remained in a state of readiness until its official opening on 30 April 2014 (Jordan Times, 2014; UN, 2014). Unlike the scenario in Zaatari, the case of Azraq benefited from over a year of meticulous planning combined with hindsight from its predecessor camp (Jordan Times, 2014). The UNHCR representative in Jordan portrayed Azraq as the gold standard in implementation, thus labelling the exemplar as one of best-planned camps in the world (Jordan Times, 2014). Spanning a vast area of approximately 15 km² across the Azraq desert, the UNHCR and SRAD introduced a

new policy of spatial differentiation which markedly differed from Zaatari's ad hoc model. The subsequent spatial layout replaced the district terminology used in Zaatari with four distinct villages allocated for housing refugees. Each village was further subdivided into districts, divided further into plots, with each plot comprising two rows of identical shelters arranged in specific geometric order (Dalal et al., 2018). The villages were designed as self-contained developments, each equipped with its own schools, NGO facilities, community centres, and market spaces containing 100 market stalls reserved for camp entrepreneurs (Davis, 2019).

Significantly, the UNHCR underlined that Azraq's subsequent formation incorporated pertinent lessons learnt from the initial experience in Zaatari (UNHCR, 2014a), thus reflecting a premeditated attempt to avoid the perceived planning failures associated with Zaatari's organic development. However, the establishment of the Azraq marketplace some two years following the camp opening evidently highlighted the economic disparity between the parallel camps (Dalal et al., 2018). Despite population growth to 41,000 by 2024 (approximately half of Zaatari's population), Azraq's methodically planned environment, while providing shelter and safety, struggled to meet refugees' needs for agency and economic autonomy, evidenced by its meagre 375 registered businesses. In contrast, Zaatari hosts over 1,800+ operational businesses (Carlisle, 2022), earning it recognition as the most entrepreneurial refugee camp in the world and achieving a near 65% employment rate (Davis, 2019).

4.3.4. Comparative Case Research Design

The main research employed a comparative case study design to examine entrepreneurial agency across the theoretical sample of the Zaatari and Azraq refugee camps. A case study research design involves an in-depth investigation of a real-life phenomenon in its naturalistic setting over a period of time (Easterby-Smith et al., 2018). In the management sciences, case studies typically involve single or multiple case research designs.

Critics of single case studies argue that constructivist or subjectivistic approaches to understanding should be avoided in favour of research designs that emulate the scientific method (Yin, 2018). For Yin, single case studies produce vast amounts of data, which in unison with a subjectivist epistemology, can lead some researchers into the pitfall of partially or researcher bias. Furthermore, single case studies have been critiqued for their propensity to generate over-determined theories, which invariably do not generalise or transfer well

(Eisenhardt, 2021). Eisenhardt posits the utility of iterative processes that offer comparison through replication logic to enable theory building. Put simply, theory building involves the researcher forming links or relationships between ‘constructs’ that are augmented by ‘mechanisms’ (i.e. theoretical arguments) that serve to explicate a central phenomenon under investigation (Suddaby, 2014). Thus, it is pertinent to consider the merits of a comparative research design as an alternative and more robust approach to single case research designs. Comparative studies involving multiple cases, also referred to as the ‘Eisenhardt Method’, inherently facilitate the comparison of the idiosyncratic features between different contexts (Langley and Abdallah, 2011). Customarily, through the examination of multiple or dual contexts, researchers can augment the validity of their research findings (Eisenhardt, 2021).

Central to comparative case research is the concept of *theoretical sampling*, the purposeful selection of cases based on their potential to illuminate theoretical constructs and relationships (Eisenhardt, 2021). This approach differs from statistical sampling by selecting cases that can potentially contribute to theory development (Eisenhardt, 1989). Specifically, Eisenhardt (2021) advises selecting cases that possess common antecedents yet exhibit divergent outcomes. Following case selection as defined in the previous chapter, robust comparative research requires defining *key constructs and units of analysis*, explicating the mechanisms that elucidate why relationships between constructs emerge, establishing *boundary conditions* that offer alternate explanations, and conducting systematic *cross-case analysis*. The subsequent sections detail how this study implemented these analytical procedures in line with the Eisenhardt (2021) approach.

4.3.4.1. *Theoretical Sampling*

The Zaatari and Azraq refugee camps in Jordan were selected as the theoretical sample for this comparative study. Despite these camps being situated in the same host nation, thus having homogenous institutional structures, such as the presence of the UNHCR and the SRAD (i.e. government operated agency established for the care of Syrian refugees), these camps present with differential economic outcomes (Davis, 2019; UNHCR, 2022). For instance, at Zaatari, there was a significant proliferation in businesses since its opening in 2012, with 1,800 registered businesses, compared to only 375 businesses registered at the Azraq camp. Despite a notable population difference between camps (Table 6), Zaatari boasts 130% more enterprises than its sister camp (i.e. as a percentage of its population).

Thus, cases with common antecedents (Eisenhardt, 2021), Syrian refugees fleeing the same conflict, requiring humanitarian support, and subject to the same formal institutions within Jordan, theoretically allow researchers to examine the structural processes that produce divergent outcomes. In this way, these two camps or cases serve as *polar types* in terms of their economic outcomes, further aligning to the Eisenhardt method. Through replication logic (Yin, 2018), examining cases with common antecedents yet polar outcomes enables theory-building by illustrating whether theoretical propositions hold across the sample.

	Zaatari camp (Est. 2012)	Azraq camp (Est. 2014)
Population	82,268	39,322
Children	55%	60%
Houses headed by women	1 in 3	1 in 4
Shelters	26,000	9,000
Work permits	2,156	1,177
Businesses	1,800	375

Table 6: Comparative demographic data between camps (adapted from UNHCR)

Following case selection, securing physical access to the camps required formal clearance procedures. I received security clearance to conduct fieldwork in the camps from the Jordanian Ministry of Interior on 29 May 2023. The permit was granted for a two-year open period, with specific placeholder fieldwork dates provided to the ministry. The process to obtain access required me drafting and submitting a university approved research proposal (Appendix B) detailing the purpose and relevance for the proposed research project. The letter along with supporting documentation (i.e. researcher passport) was submitted to the SRAD on the 20 April 2023 via email (srad@psd.gov.jo), with the subsequent camp permit being granted via email (Appendix B) on the 29 May 2023.

Access was limited to visiting each camps respective marketplaces in line with the research proposal. While full access was granted to explore the market streets of the Zaatari camp, limited access was granted for the Azraq camp. Specifically, access to the marketplaces belonging to Villages 2 and 5 was restricted, with no justification being provided for this limitation. I accessed the Azraq camp for two days between 22-23 August 2023 and accessed the Zaatari camp for two days between 27-28 December 2023, and one (final) day on 25 August 2024 in line with the Standard Operations Manual (SOP) provided by the UNHCR. The UNHCRs SOP explicitly states that permits are only valid for a period of two days within a single two-week period between the hours of 09:00 – 15:00 Sunday – Thursday (Appendix B).

Additionally, in line with the university's health and safety policy for international fieldwork (i.e. lone working), I hired the external services of a camp guide and language interpreter. I was supported by the camp guide and interpreter (i.e. all male team) thereby accessing the two camps on the aforesaid dates to undertake the research mandate. Figure 11 illustrates each respective camp's entrance.

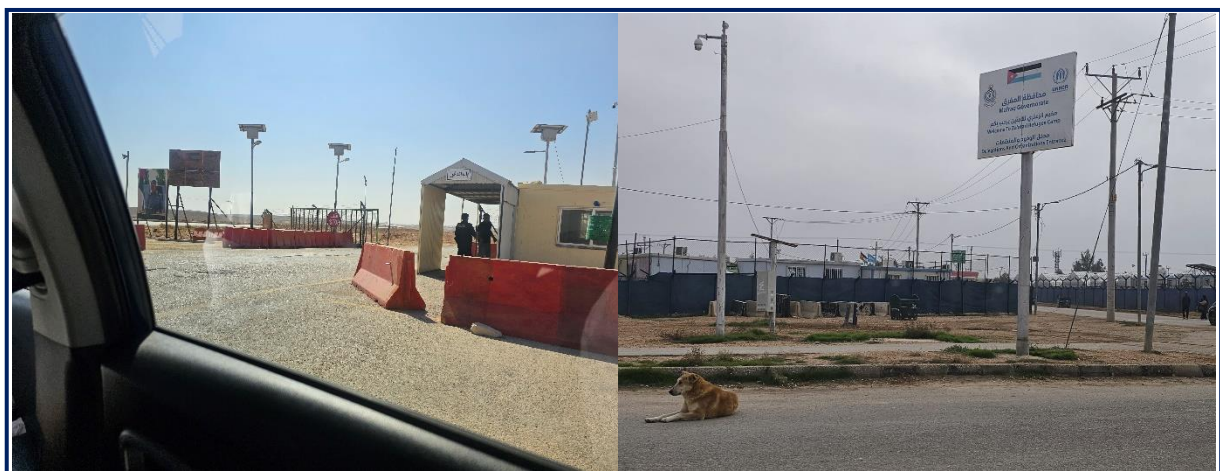


Figure 11: Photographic images of camp entrances (left – Azraq; right – Zaatari)

4.3.4.2. Key Constructs and Units of Analysis

Comparative case research requires explicit definition of theoretical constructs and their corresponding units of analysis. Constructs represent the key theoretical components under investigation, while units of analysis operationalise these constructs for empirical examination.

For this study, the theoretical constructs belonging to SST are utilised and have been previously defined in the study's theoretical framework.

Regarding units of analysis, the challenge of identifying appropriate measures within the field of entrepreneurship is not a definitive task. The task of identifying opportunities is further complicated by the understanding that opportunities are embedded within social structures, with scholars arguing for framing opportunities as suitable metrics (Shane and Venkataraman, 2000). However, such a limited purview often overlooks the nuanced roles entrepreneurs play in the opportunity recognition process (Klein and Foss, 2008), made further complicated by the constrained nature of hostile contexts such as refugee camps.

Within entrepreneurship scholarship the scope of analyses commonly spans the macro-micro spectrum (Abebe, 2023). At the micro or individual level, entrepreneurs are typically the focal point, while at the macro level, the analysis of the broader institutional landscape, such as the local, regional, or national dimensions usually takes precedent. While a multi-level perspective evidently offers broader empirics, the adoption of an exclusive individual-level lens tends to dominate in entrepreneurship literature due to its empirical simplicity. However, this methodological bias contradicts both the theoretical foundation of structuration and the CR philosophy underpinning this study, as it undermines the impact of structural forces on human agency (Davidsson, 2007). CR addresses this through retroduction, thus reasoning backwards from observable outcomes (i.e. divergent entrepreneurial results in Zaatari vs. Azraq) to identify the underlying mechanisms and structural configurations that produced them. This logic requires multi-level analysis that captures both structural forces and agentic responses, as evident outcomes surface from their recursive interactions rather than from either alone.

Accordingly, this study employs SSTs methodological bracketing (Stones, 2005) which endeavours to capture both the levels of context (structure) and conduct (agency), thus being emblematic of the structuration process. The previous chapter outlines Stones's (2005) description of context and conduct analysis in more detail, however, Table 7 summarises the particular units of analysis employed in this study.

Context (macro/meso)	Conduct (individual)
Host nation policy; role of support systems: i.e. SRAD and UNHCR etc; geographical location of camps; supply chains; market street architecture; economic outcomes; position-practice relations; power dynamics; market demand and competition, relationship, and interactions with local communities.	Individual entrepreneurs' (habitus): motivations, desires, attitudes, past experiences; (conjunctural specific): entrepreneurial skills, knowledge of the here-and-now; entrepreneurial action and strategies taken, type of business, adaption and response, collective agency, social networks, and embeddedness.

Table 7: Units of analysis within each methodological bracket

4.3.4.3. Mechanisms within Strong Structuration Theory

Comparative case research requires explicating the mechanisms governing the relationships between the constructs associated with the nominated theoretical framework (Eisenhardt, 2021). For SST, this involves elucidating the connections between external structures, internal structures, agency, and outcomes within the quadripartite framework. Central to this feedback loop is the interplay between the outcomes of agency and their dual impact on external (social) and internal (human) structures (Stones, 2005). In this study, entrepreneurial refugees function as active agents who draw upon their internal structures, including general dispositions (i.e. interpretive schemas shaped by habitus) and conjuncturally-specific knowledge (i.e. contextual understanding), to respond to opportunities embedded within their external social structures. SST's feedback loop thus serves as the connective tissue, linking agents' internal structures to external structures through the conduit of outcomes (Kennedy-Reid, 2014).

<i>Zaatari refugee camp</i>	SST construct	<i>Azraq refugee camp</i>
Institutional structures of the host nation and international stakeholders i.e. SRAD and UNHCR	External structures	Institutional structures of the host nation and international stakeholders i.e. SRAD and UNHCR
Displaced Syrian refugees (first arrivals), now situated in a refugee camp in the host nation of Jordan	Internal structures	Displaced Syrian refugees (second arrivals), now situated in a refugee camp in the host nation of Jordan
TBC	Active agency	TBC
1,800 registered businesses, representing 130% more enterprises than Azraq (% population)	Outcomes	375 registered businesses. Camp est. in 2014 (i.e. 2 years later than Zaatari)

Table 8: ‘Filling in the blanks’ using UNHCR demographical data

This study adopts a retroductive approach that begins with observed outcomes and works backwards to identify the mechanisms and structural configurations that produced them. Table 8 presents the study's theoretical sampling (i.e. Zaatari vs. Azraq), common antecedents (external and internal structures), and divergent outcomes, thus demonstrating how these elements combine to accentuate refugee entrepreneurial agency. SST theorisation further requires consideration of position-practice relations between agents and their institutional contexts, specifically the power dynamics within this relationship (Refai et al., 2024). A refugee's position within a camp setting, for instance, is influenced by their social and human capital, thereby shaping their entrepreneurial practices.

4.3.4.4. Boundary Conditions

As ST originates from the field of sociology, it is important to identify contexts where structuration processes are likely to occur and be observable. Both conceptual and empirical applications of ST and SST reviewed in the previous chapter predominantly involved small-scale social interactions within modest institutional settings. Therefore, ST's efficacy may be

better suited to examining localised social phenomena as opposed to large-scale systems such as global institutions.

Several contextual factors influence SST's applicability to refugee camp settings. First, SST highlights the interplay between agency and structure over time, suggesting its relevance may be limited in contexts of sudden, drastic transformation where gradual structuration processes are disrupted. Refugee camps typically involve extended periods of settlement where agency-structure interactions can unfold over time, making them appropriate contexts for SST application. Second, SST's efficacy depends on the stability of external institutional structures in question (Stones, 2005). While refugee camps may appear unstable, scholars characterise them as microcosms of host nation economies, exhibiting predictable relationships between host nation GDP and within-camp economic activity (Chatty, 2016). This relative stability makes camps appropriate sites for examining structuration processes. Third, methodological considerations influence framework utility. For instance, SST was specifically designed to be more methodologically grounded than ST (Stones, 2005), requiring adequate empirical access to both contextual conditions and agentic conduct. Further, data triangulation becomes essential in this regard, augmenting analytical rigour through multiple data sources. Section (4.3) details this study's triangulated approach, employing naturalistic data, participant observation, and semi-structured interviews.

In sum, specifying boundary conditions directs attention toward potential framework limitations. For SST in refugee camp contexts, these relate predominately to the scale and stability of the social phenomenon, temporal dynamics enabling structuration processes, institutional structure stability, and the capacity to capture multi-level processes through systematic data collection.

4.3.4.5. Comparative Analysis

The comparative case approach used in this study employed two analytical procedures: replication logic (Yin, 1984), and systematic cross-case analysis (Eisenhardt, 2021).

Replication logic involves analysing each case initially as a separate entity (Yin, 1984). This qualitative approach emphasises contextual understanding through multiple settings. The objective is determining whether insights from one case can extend or replicate across another, thereby achieving analytical generality rather than statistical generalisation to populations.

Moreover, the use of replication logic further guided case selection in this case study. Theoretical samples are selected to elucidate either similar results (literal replication) or contrasting outcomes for predictable reasons (theoretical replication) (Yin, 1984). This study employed theoretical replication: the construct of outcomes illustrated notable differences in operational businesses across camps (i.e. Zaatari: 1,800; Azraq: 375). Where cases yield homogeneous findings, this typically reinforces the frameworks efficacy, whereas heterogeneous findings suggest the need for framework refinement, thereby enabling theoretical advancement. As this study evidenced heterogeneous findings across the theoretical sample, replication logic facilitated framework refinement, most notably in relation to the SST configuration.

Cross-case analysis involves examining similarities, deviations, and patterns across cases (Eisenhardt, 2021). For this study, systematic comparison between cases served two purposes: first, establishing the reliability of findings through consistent patterns, such as the relationship between weak external structures and shadow institutional formation observed across multiple data sources in Zaatari; and second, promoting analytical creativity by highlighting unexpected mechanisms, for instance, how similar entrepreneurial motivations produced divergent outcomes depending on temporal, spatial, and regulatory configurations.

The comparative benchmark between camps proved essential for developing the enabling-constraining spectrum, as examining Zaatari in isolation may have attributed outcomes solely to pronounced refugee agency, while examining Azraq alone may have concluded institutional control uniformly prevents entrepreneurship. Only through cross-case comparison did the dynamic interplay between external structures and internal structures (i.e. ES-IS weighting) become apparent. Further, this comparative approach enabled identification of key theoretical contributions including shadow institutions as dual-functioning mechanisms, and the concept of institutional immunity requiring IS ascendancy over ES.

4.4. METHODS DIMENSION

Regarding data collection methods, this study utilised *naturalistic data*, participant *observation*, and *semi-structured interviews*. While initially employed as independent methods, the research process involved iterative movement between approaches as empirical challenges began to surface. For instance, when authorities prevented direct inquiries about informal supply chains and cross-border activities in Zaatari during interviews, the study compensated

through naturalistic data sources and observational inference to elucidate such mechanisms. This flexible, responsive approach further enabled within-method triangulation (Palaganas et al., 2017), whereby constraints encountered in one method prompted strategic deployment of alternative methods to address analytical gaps. The following sections define each methodological approach and explain how they complemented one another throughout the research process.

4.4.1. Naturalistic Data

Naturalistic data represents a methods-based approach that captures social phenomena independent of researcher intervention (Silverman, 2021). Such data promotes authenticity by documenting events and interactions that occur naturally rather than being manufactured through formal research procedures (Flick, 2018). Flick outlines two criteria constituting naturalistic data: the ‘unwell researcher test’ (i.e. emergent data without researcher presence/input) and the ‘action recovery test’ (i.e. data that can be repeatedly analysed to reconstruct original phenomena). Unlike interviews or observations that require active researcher involvement, naturalistic data exists independently, increasing epistemic validity. The action recovery test particularly distinguishes multimedia data (e.g. images, audio, video) from text-based fieldnotes (e.g. diary), as the former preserves raw phenomena for iterative analysis while the latter becomes filtered through the researcher's interpretive lens.

Prior to fieldwork, naturalistic data informed the development of the interview guide and observational framework. News articles from Al Jazeera and BBC provided contextual documentation of camp conditions, informal economic activity, and humanitarian policy shifts. UNHCR dashboard data offered quantitative marketplace statistics for both camps, including business registration figures and sectoral distribution. Satellite imagery, architectural plans from urban planning journals (Dalal et al., 2018), and UNHCR marketplace maps enabled me to familiarise themselves with the physical layout of each camp, including market street design and the spatial distribution of commercial activity, before entering the field. This preparatory engagement allowed interview questions to be grounded in the material realities of each site rather than abstract assumptions about camp organisation, and ensured that observational attention during fieldwork was directed toward analytically relevant areas of the marketplace.

Subsequently, during and following fieldwork, naturalistic data assumed a reconstructive function. When direct interview inquiries were restricted by camp gatekeepers, particularly in relation to informal supply chains and shadow institutional operations, news reporting, UNHCR statistical data, an archived interview with Zaatari and Azraq's former camp manager from Der Spiegel International, photographs of business premises, and audio recordings of entrepreneur interviews were drawn upon to piece together narratives that participant testimony alone could not yield. By preserving data in authentic form, this approach facilitated repeated analysis as theoretical understanding developed, thus enabling iterative refinement of emergent themes.

4.4.2. Observation

Within qualitative/CR research, observation can be categorised along two dimensions: covert versus overt (participant awareness) and participatory versus non-participatory (researcher involvement) (Neergaard and Ulhøi, 2007). These dimensions form four distinct observer roles (Figure 12), highlighting the relationship between researcher openness and empirical involvement. This matrix guides the selection of appropriate observational modes while raising pertinent ethical considerations (Neergaard and Ulhøi, 2007).

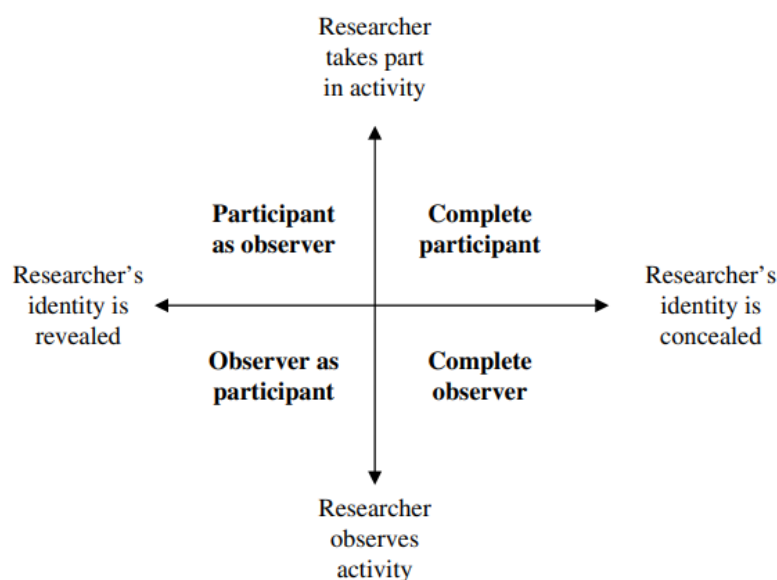


Figure 12: The four observer roles (Neergaard and Ulhøi 2007)

Given the complexities of accessing refugee camps and my non-refugee status, this study adopted the 'observer as participant' approach. I therefore acknowledged their observational

role and interacted with subjects accordingly without the need to prioritise participation. This approach balanced my outsider status, hence informed by preliminary naturalistic data despite lacking initial insider knowledge. This positioning enabled fresh perspectives on spatial arrangements and informal activities while accepting potential misunderstandings due to limited contact (Neergaard and Ulhøi, 2007). Multiple field visits across an 18-month period partially mitigated superficiality concerns, enabling observation of entrepreneurial activities across different seasonal periods and market conditions in both camps (i.e. Summer and Winter).

Audio fieldnotes and photographic documentation served as the primary observational modes. Audio recording captured real-time observational details and immediate reflections, while photographs preserved spatial arrangements and physical infrastructure for post-fieldwork analysis. This dual approach proved particularly valuable when observing spatial configurations and when documenting informal economic activities that participants were reluctant to discuss formally. Photographic images facilitated detailed post-fieldwork examination of spatial relationships, business clustering patterns, and infrastructural adaptations (e.g. such as converted residential units functioning as shops) that illuminated entrepreneurial responses to structural constraints. Audio recording captured temporal context (e.g. time of day, seasonal variations) and dynamic observations (i.e. customer flow patterns, vendor interactions), which proved important for understanding how camp design influenced entrepreneurial possibilities. Audio fieldnotes could be directly transcribed into Microsoft Word for analysis, whereas photographs required researcher commentary to contextualise and explicate observed phenomena. Combined, these methods enabled post-fieldwork reflection when cross-referencing observational data with interview transcripts and naturalistic sources.

4.4.3. Interviews

Semi-structured interviews (SSI) offer a flexible and effective approach for qualitative research, providing balance between the rigidity of structured discussions and open-ended unstructured interactions. This hybrid approach, thus combining predetermined questions with responsiveness to participant statements, is well-suited to examining complex social phenomena (Rubin and Rubin, 2011). Their flexibility allows researchers to adapt to the flow of discussion as it progresses, while their participant-focussed nature creates a more comfortable environment, potentially yielding more reliable and authentic data (Creswell,

2013). This malleability makes SSIs particularly suitable for complex fieldwork contexts such as refugee camps.

Nonetheless, SSIs require specific researcher competencies (Easterby-Smith et al., 2018). Easterby-Smith et al. accentuate that researchers must balance relevance and retention, thus remaining attentive to participant statements while directing discussion toward research-relevant matters. A key challenge lies in avoiding data contamination through the researcher's own reflections and biases (Charmaz, 2014). To mitigate this risk, several techniques were employed throughout the fieldwork, including reflexivity to monitor researcher assumptions, data triangulation across multiple sources, and laddering as a probing strategy (Fontana and Frey, 2005). Laddering encourages participants to expand on their responses through follow-up questions that remain open-ended, thus allowing for deeper exploration of participant experiences whilst attempting to minimise interviewer influence (Fontana and Frey, 2005).

In sum, these principles guided the collection of interview data across the entirety of the study. Overall, a total of 45 refugee entrepreneurs were interviewed: 25 in Zaatari and 20 in Azraq (Tables 9 and 10). The disparity in sampling ratios across the two sites warrants methodological clarification, as Zaatari's 25 interviews were drawn from a population of approximately 1,800 registered businesses, while Azraq's 20 were drawn from approximately 375. While these ratios differ, the sampling approach in both sites was governed by two intersecting constraints, institutional access conditions and a deliberate pursuit of distributional coverage within those constraints.

Access to both camps was regulated by the SRAD, whose standard operating procedures permitted fieldwork only during two-day windows within any given two-week period. Given my UK residency, this effectively confined data collection to a single concentrated visit per site, precluding the iterative sampling that might otherwise have been pursued. Within these constraints, a systematic approach to participant selection was adopted. In Zaatari, interviews commenced at the beginning of Market Street 1 and proceeded sequentially through Market Street 2, ensuring coverage across the camp's primary commercial spine and capturing businesses from different spatial locations and trading sectors. In Azraq, where access was further restricted to Villages 3 and 6, with Villages 2 and 5 remaining closed on security grounds, an equivalent distribution across sectors within the two accessible villages was pursued. This ensured that the sample was not clustered around a single area or business type but reflected the broader commercial landscape of each accessible zone. It is also worth noting

that Zaatari, as one of the most extensively studied refugee camps in the empirical literature (Abushaikh et al., 2021; Alkhaled, 2019; Alkhaled and Sasaki, 2022; Turner, 2020), has a population accustomed to researcher presence, which facilitated relatively open engagement during interviews. Azraq, by contrast, represents to my knowledge the first empirical study of entrepreneurship conducted within the camp, which partly accounts for the more guarded participant responses observed and further contextualises the access constraints encountered there. Together, the sampling strategy prioritised distributional representativeness within access-constrained conditions rather than proportional representativeness relative to the total business population, consistent with theoretical sampling logic whereby the analytical value of cases derives from their capacity to illuminate variation and pattern (Eisenhardt, 2021). The achievement of thematic saturation within both sites further supports the adequacy of the sample sizes obtained.

All camp participants were male refugees, with the majority (96%) in Zaatari originating from Daraa, while Azraq demonstrated greater geographical diversity with participants from Homs (35%), Damascus (35%), and Daraa (30%). Notably, 20% of Zaatari entrepreneurs operated businesses directly related to their pre-displacement experience, compared to 35% in Azraq who had either ceased trading, worked as employees, or rented their business premises. The interview guide, including core questions and probing themes, is provided in Appendix E.

Participant Identifier	Age	Gender M/F	Camp/District	Place of Origin (Syria)	Camp Business	Year Est.	Previous Experience (Syria)
RE1-Z	50 yrs	M	Zataari, Main Street 1	Daraa	Restaurant	2023	Truck driver
RE2-Z	21 yrs	M	Zataari, Main Street 1	Daraa	Coffee shop	2021	Employee
RE3-Z	18 yrs	M	Zataari, Main Street 1	Homs	Taxi driver (Donkey)	2021	Student
RE4-Z	43 yrs	M	Zataari, Main Street 1	Daraa	Bike sales/repairs	2021	Farmer
RE5-Z*	51 yrs	M	Zataari, Main Street 1	Daraa	Fruit & veg	2021	Fruit & veg
RE6-Z	60 yrs	M	Zataari, Main Street 1	Daraa	DIY store	2015	Dairy factory
RE7-Z	38 yrs	M	Zataari, Main Street 1	Daraa	White goods	2020	Labourer
RE8-Z	21 yrs	M	Zataari, Main Street 1	Daraa	Hairdresser	2023	Student
RE9-Z	41 yrs	M	Zataari, Main Street 1	Daraa	Bakery	2013	Farmer
RE10-Z*	42 yrs	M	Zataari, Main Street 1	Daraa	Butcher/restaurant	2012	Butcher
RE11-Z	29 yrs	M	Zataari, Main Street 1	Daraa	Coffee cart	2013	Student
RE12-Z	25 yrs	M	Zataari, Main Street 1	Daraa	Tobacconist	2013	Tailor
RE13-Z	25 yrs	M	Zataari, Main Street 1	Daraa	Clothes shop	2023	Student
RE14-Z	53 yrs	M	Zataari, Main Street 1	Daraa	Shoe repairs	2014	Construction
RE15-Z*	37 yrs	M	Zataari, Main Street 1	Daraa	Delivery driver (cart)	2014	Delivery driver
RE16-Z	25 yrs	M	Zataari, Main Street 2	Daraa	Cleaning materials	2022	Factory worker
RE17-Z*	55 yrs	M	Zataari, Main Street 2	Daraa	Bakery	2014	Bakery
RE18-Z	45 yrs	M	Zataari, Main Street 2	Daraa	Shoe shop	2013	Army
RE19-Z	44 yrs	M	Zataari, Main Street 2	Daraa	Fruit & veg	2012	Employee
RE20-Z	22 yrs	M	Zataari, Main Street 2	Daraa	White goods	2012	Employee
RE21-Z	27 yrs	M	Zataari, Main Street 2	Daraa	Barber	2017	Student
RE22-Z	27 yrs	M	Zataari, Main Street 2	Daraa	Spice shop	2014	Farmer
RE23-Z*	56 yrs	M	Zataari, Main Street 2	Daraa	Bike shop	2012	Carpenter
RE24-Z	55 yrs	M	Zataari, Main Street 1	Daraa	Baker	2013	Butcher
RE25-Z	33 yrs	M	Zataari, Main Street 1	Daraa	Phone shop	2013	Student

Table 9: Overview of participant interviews and contextual information: Zaatari camp

Demographical composition: **Gender**, Male (100%) (refugee camp entrepreneurs); **Origin**, Daraa = 96% (24); Homs = 4% (1)

*Refugee entrepreneurs at Zataari (5 = 20%) highlighted with direct, relatable experience to current camp venture. The remaining RCEs (20 = 80%) demonstrate an entrepreneurial/career pivot

Participant Identifier	Age	Gender M/F	Camp/Village	Place of origin (Syria)	Camp Business	Year Est.	Previous experience (Syria)
RE1-A*	23 yrs	M	Azraq, Village 2	Homs	<i>Ceased trading</i>	2023	Student
RE2-A	50 yrs	M	Azraq, Village 3	Damascus	Restaurant	2016	Supermarket owner
RE3-A*	37 yrs	M	Azraq, Village 3	Damascus	Coffee shop (<i>tenant</i>)	2021	Truck driver
RE4-A*	40 yrs	M	Azraq, Village 3	Damascus	Confectionary shop (<i>employee</i>)	2021	Employee
RE5-A	35 yrs	M	Azraq, Village 3	Daraa	Bike repair shop	2016	Car mechanic
RE6-A	62 yrs	M	Azraq, Village 3	Homs	Iron welding	2016	Handyman
RE7-A*	18 yrs	M	Azraq, Village 3	Homs	Phone shop (<i>employee</i>)	2021	Student
RE8-A*	29 yrs	M	Azraq, Village 3	Daraa	Dessert/sweet shop (<i>employee</i>)	2018	Employee
RE9-A	19 yrs	M	Azraq, Village 3	Homs	Hairdresser	2021	Student
RE10-A	36 yrs	M	Azraq, Village 3	Daraa	DIY shop	2020	Accountant
RE11-A	31 yrs	M	Azraq, Village 3	Daraa	Clothing shop	2021	Clothing shop
RE12-A	45 yrs	M	Azraq, Village 6	Homs	Taxi driver	2016	Farmer
RE13-A	32 yrs	M	Azraq, Village 6	Damascus	Air conditioning	2021	Army (soldier)
RE14-A*	37 yrs	M	Azraq, Village 6	Damascus	Tobacconist (<i>employee</i>)	2020	Student
RE15-A	18 yrs	M	Azraq, Village 6	Daraa	Fruit & veg vendor	2019	Student
RE16-A	19 yrs	M	Azraq, Village 6	Daraa	Tailor	2023	Student
RE17-A	57 yrs	M	Azraq, Village 6	Damascus	Butcher	2020	Painter
RE18-A	32 yrs	M	Azraq, Village 6	Damascus	Clothing store	2018	Trader
RE19-A	57 yrs	M	Azraq, Village 6	Homs	Butcher	2021	Butcher
RE20-A*	40 yrs	M	Azraq, Village 6	Homs	Restaurant (<i>employee</i>)	2016	Restaurant employee

Table 10: Overview of participant interviews and contextual information: Azraq camp

Demographical composition: **Gender**, Male (100%); **Origin**, Homis = 35% (7); Damascus = 35% (7); Daraa = 30% (6)

*Highlighted fields illustrate refugees who either ceased trading, rent or work as an employee in the respective camp business

To complement these findings and further contextualise refugee entrepreneur accounts, additional interviews were conducted with a former UN representative (urban planner familiar with both camps), as well as the camp guide and translator who facilitated field access, bringing the total number of interviews to 48. Prior to the main study, 5 pilot interviews with humanitarian volunteers in France were conducted to refine the interview protocol, though this data was excluded from the main analysis. Table 11 provides an overview of the interview data, detailing context, mode and interview duration. Verbal consent was obtained from refugee entrepreneur participants prior to interview commencement, while standard written consent was acquired from non-refugee participants (i.e. UN representative, humanitarian volunteers, camp guide, translator etc).

Interview Stage	Interviewee(s)	Refugee camp	Mode	Duration
Pilot study – France (July, 2023)	5 interviews were conducted with humanitarian volunteers	Calais & Dunkirk refugee camps	Remotely (Microsoft Teams)	40-45 min each
Main study – UN representative [UN-UP] (July 2023)	1 interview was conducted with a former United Nations employee (urban planner)	Azraq & Zaatari refugee camp	Remotely (Microsoft Teams)	45 min
Main study – Azraq: Villages 3 & 6 (August, 2023)	20 interviews with refugee entrepreneurs in the Azraq camp	Azraq refugee camp (Summer 2023)	In-person, face-to-face via the aid of a translator	10-40 min
Main study – Zaatari: Market street 1 (December, 2023)	17 interviews with refugee entrepreneurs on Market Street 1	Zaatari refugee camp (Winter 2023)	In-person, face-to-face via the aid of a translator	10-20 min
Main study – Zaatari: Market street 2 (August, 2024)	8 interviews with refugee entrepreneurs on Market Street 2	Zaatari refugee camp (Summer 2024)	In-person, face-to-face via the aid of a translator	10-20 min
Main study – camp guide [CG] & translator [TL]	2 interviews (concurrently) with camp guide and translator	Azraq & Zaatari refugee camps – sharing insights and reflections (i.e. summative)	Remotely (Microsoft Teams)	45 min

Table 11: Overview of interviews with study participants

4.4.4. Triangulation and Reflexivity

Triangulation through within-method data collection serves to validate and enhance the dataset by integrating complementary sources (Fontana and Frey, 2005). Cross-verification enables researchers to broaden their interpretive lens, which is particularly valuable in complex social settings such as refugee camps where the phenomenon under investigation cannot be fully understood through solitary methods alone. This study employed an amalgam of researcher observation, participant interviews, and naturalistic/secondary data to achieve methodological triangulation (see Figure 13).

Reflexivity, the process of critical self-reflection to mitigate against researcher bias, was employed throughout the research process (Palaganas et al., 2017). Central to this was an ongoing engagement with questions of positionality, such as who I am in relation to the field, how that shaped what participants were willing to share, and how my own interpretive frame required conscious interrogation at each stage of data collection and analysis.

As a researcher of Jordanian heritage with functional Arabic language ability, I entered the Jordanian field sites with a partial cultural familiarity that both facilitated and complicated data collection. While this did not constitute insider status in any straightforward sense, it shaped how I navigated the field. The use of a Jordanian camp guide and a local translator was not simply a practical accommodation but a deliberate reflexive strategy. Both served as cultural mediators who could contextualise participant responses and flag where my interpretations risked oversimplification. The contrasting reception across sites was itself analytically informative. In Zaatari, participants were broadly accustomed to researchers and engaged with relative openness, having been the subject of sustained academic and humanitarian attention. In Azraq, by contrast, participants were more guarded, and access required greater patience and relational trust. This differential reception meant that the data generated across the two sites was not symmetrical, and I remained conscious throughout analysis that participant willingness to disclose varied as a function of institutional context as much as personal disposition.

Access itself was neither straightforward nor guaranteed. Although appropriate documentation and institutional approval had been secured through the Syrian Refugee Affairs Directorate (SRAD) prior to fieldwork, on-the-ground officials at both camps at times sought to impede

entry. That access was ultimately maintained reflects the persistence of the research team rather than the smooth operation of formal permission structures. This experience sharpened my awareness of the gap between institutional authorisation and lived research practice, and reinforced the importance of treating access as a relational and ongoing negotiation rather than a fixed precondition.

A further reflexive consideration concerns the emotional disposition I brought to the field. Conducting research among refugee entrepreneurs, many of whom had experienced significant displacement and loss, generated a strong and consistent empathetic response. This empathy was not contingent on shared religious background but reflected a broader human orientation toward the participants' circumstances. I was conscious, however, that empathy, while ethically appropriate, can distort analytical judgement if it leads the researcher to present participants as passive victims rather than active agents, or to minimise structural constraints in favour of affirming individual resilience. Managing this tension required deliberate effort. I entered the field with an existing familiarity with the naturalistic and documentary record of the camps, including maps, news media, and humanitarian reports, which provided an empirical anchor against which interview data could be read critically rather than accepted at face value.

Several further reflexive practices were implemented throughout data collection. Careful participant selection ensured interviews were conducted across all quarters of the marketplace within each camp, spanning different villages and streets to minimize the risk of spatially concentrated sampling. The inclusion of non-refugee participants, including a UN representative, a camp guide, and translators, provided external perspectives on refugee camp entrepreneurship and served as a check on participant-generated accounts. Interview questions (Appendix E) were cross-verified with the supervisory team to minimize leading formulations. I remained cognisant of inherent power dynamics, particularly the non-refugee status of the interviewer and the potential for this to shape participant responses. To mitigate this, dialogic reflexivity (Palaganas et al., 2017) was employed through the translator by verifying interviewee statements during interviews. Post-fieldwork, joint interviews were conducted remotely with the camp guide and translator, providing an additional reflexive layer by allowing me to cross-verify research reflections with those not directly involved in the analysis stage.

Overall, this combined focus on reflexive practice and methodological triangulation facilitated broader exploration of the interplay between entrepreneurial agency and social structures. The iterative application of multiple methods allowed for ongoing comparison between data strands, thus enhancing the validity of findings while mitigating researcher bias associated with single-method approaches (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1997).

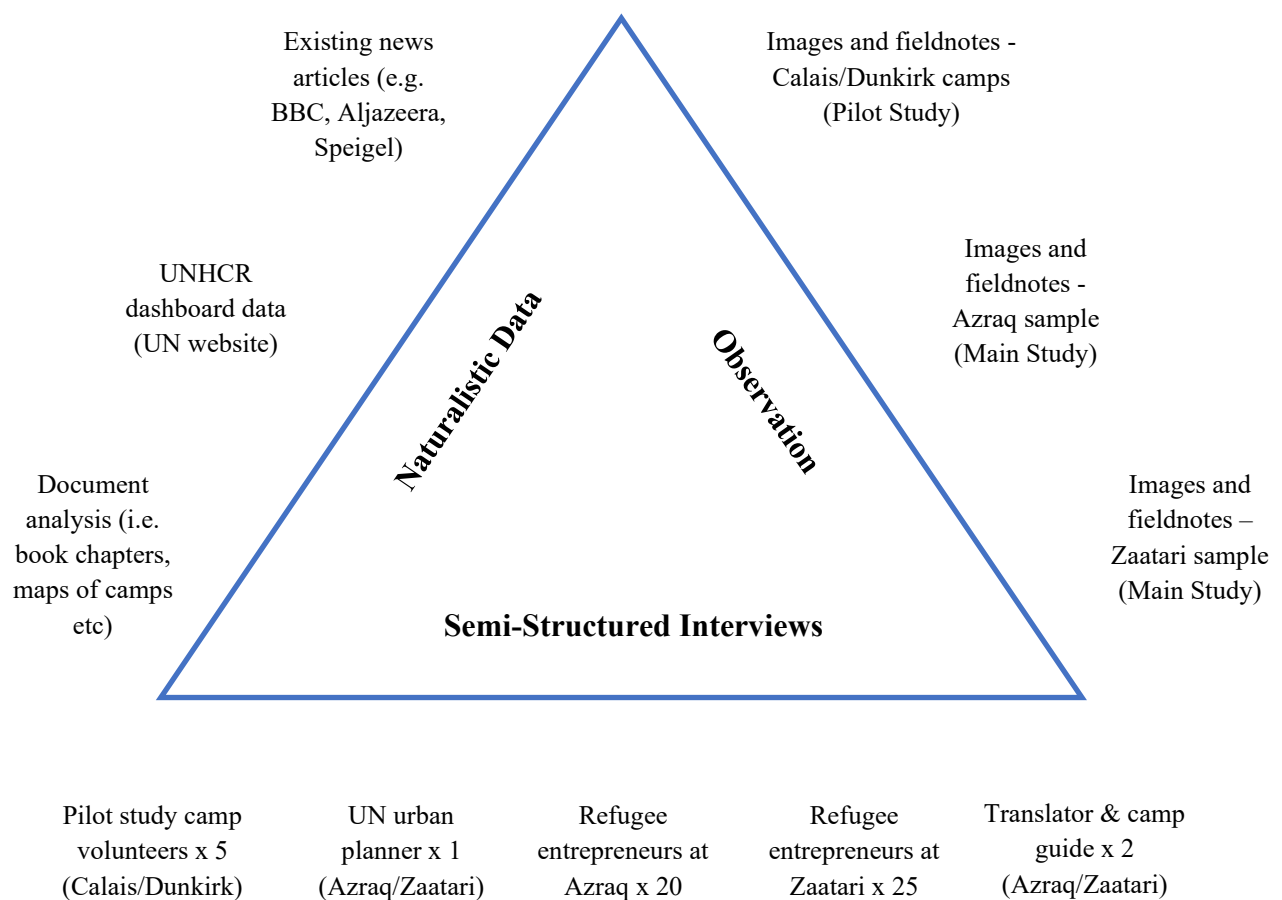


Figure 13: Conceptual overview of the within-data triangulation method

4.5. ANALYTICAL DIMENSION

This section outlines the study's analytical approach, employing a two-tiered framework integrating contextual understanding with systematic data analysis. Consistent with the study's use of retroductive logic, the analysis combined Stones' (2005) context-conduct framework with data structuring templates (Gioia, 2021). Context-conduct analysis, detailed in the theoretical and empirical framework provided the overarching framework for examining structure-agency relationships, thereby distinguishing between external structural conditions (context) and internal agentic responses (conduct). Within these analytical frames, the Gioia (2021) method systematically structured data through three progressive phases: open coding (first-order concepts), axial coding (second-order themes), and aggregate dimensions (theoretical constructs) (Gioia et al., 2022). This systematic approach facilitated the exploration of the mechanisms underlying entrepreneurial agency within refugee camps, thus bridging macro-level structural factors with micro-level entrepreneurial actions in line with retroductive inquiry.

4.5.1. Data Structuring within Context-Conduct Frames

The Gioia (2021) method provided a logical approach to structure qualitative data within the context-conduct analytical framework. This method has gained prominence in organisational/management scholarship for its capacity to induce qualitative rigor (Gioia, 2021). The approach guides researchers in disturbing the sediment of raw data to allow concepts to surface, thus transforming foundational data into conceptual abstractions that attempt to explicate theory. In sum, the method entails three progressive steps conducted within both the context and conduct dimensions.

First-order analysis (open coding) involved preliminary examination of the entire corpus of raw data, including naturalistic observations, interview transcripts, and fieldwork notes. At this stage, concepts adhered closely to informant-based codes such as verbatim statements, with minimal researcher interpretation at this initial stage. Whilst time-consuming, this foundational step proved necessary for subsequent refined analysis (Gioia, 2021). Microsoft Excel was used to organise and manage the coding framework throughout the analytical process. To support the retrieval of first-order expressions during this coding process, Claude (Anthropic) was used to locate relevant interviewee quotes aligned with emerging codes, allowing me to maintain responsibility for all analytical decisions and theme formulation. The objective was to

categorise initial informant-level codes, enabling the construction of axial themes at the second level. Within the context dimension, analysis distinguished between enabling and constraining structural conditions, while the conduct dimension, analysis explored transformative and reproductive agentic responses.

Second-order analysis (axial coding) reduced initial codes into manageable themes meaningful to the researcher. At this level, analysis transitioned from inductive to abductive reasoning, incorporating both grounded data and existing theory (Gioia, 2021). This iterative process aligned with retroductive inquiry by identifying potential causal mechanisms that could explicate observed entrepreneurial patterns across the camp settings. Second-order analysis was conducted within the enabling-constraining perspectives of context and the transformative-reproductive perspectives of conduct.

Aggregate dimensions represent the final analytical level, extending second-order themes into overarching theoretical constructs (Gioia, 2021). This step proved central, illustrating interconnections between the three analytical levels and providing dynamic representation of how nascent codes and themes developed into confirmed dimensions that advance theoretical boundaries. In line with retroductive logic, aggregate dimensions aimed to articulate the underlying structural and agentic mechanisms generating the entrepreneurial phenomena observed across both theoretical samples and context-conduct frames (Figure 14).

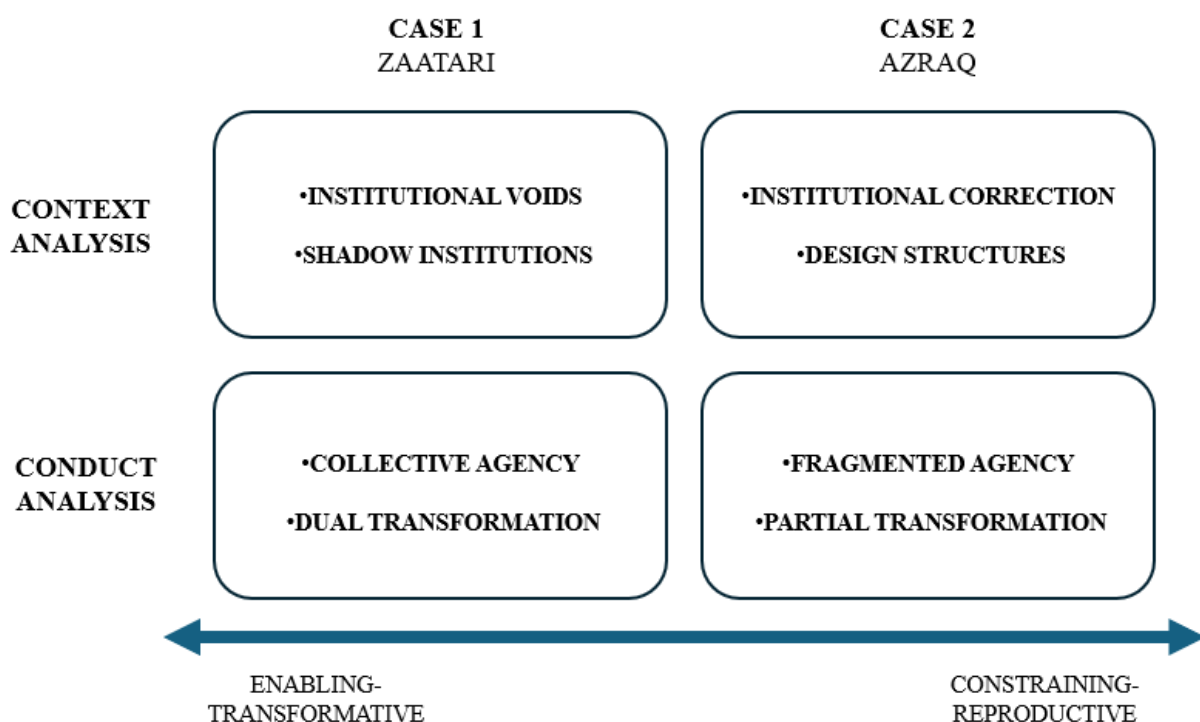


Figure 14: Aggregate themes derived from context-conduct analysis across the theoretical sample

Figure 14 provides an overview of the aggregate dimensions from the context-conduct analysis across both cases. Within the context analysis, Zaatari camp demonstrated institutional voids and shadow institutions as key structural features, while Azraq established institutional correction and design structures as its aggregate themes. Within the conduct analysis, the case of Zaatari exhibited collective agency and dual transformation, whereas Azraq displayed the concepts of fragmented agency and partial transformation. These contrasting patterns positioned the two camps along a spectrum from enabling-transformative (Zaatari) to constraining-reproductive (Azraq). The subsequent data analysis chapters (Chapter 5: Context Analysis and Chapter 6: Conduct Analysis) fully deconstruct these aggregate dimensions, thereby explicating the mechanisms through which structural conditions and agentic responses interacted to produce distinct entrepreneurial outcomes in each camp setting.

4.6. RESEARCH ETHICS

This research received ethical approval from the University of Leeds Area Faculty Research Ethics Committee on 15 July 2023 (Reference: AREA FREC 2023-0475-779) (Appendix A). The ethical framework protected participant welfare while maintaining research integrity across several key areas.

4.6.1. Ethical Considerations, Consent, and Institutional Approvals

The study addressed ethical considerations specific to refugee camp research. Given participants' vulnerable status, voluntary participation and informed consent were central concerns. The research protocol protected participants' privacy and confidentiality, recognising the sensitive refugee context and potential security risks. Interviews were scheduled during quieter business periods to minimise disruption to participants' economic activities, recognising that time away from work meant lost income.

Different consent protocols were used depending on participant type. For instance, refugee entrepreneurs gave verbal consent, an approach justified by three factors: literacy challenges among some participants, avoiding suspicion associated with formal documentation, and

respecting cultural sensitivities around signing official documents in Middle Eastern contexts. Verbal consent ensured refugee participants understood the study's purpose, procedures, risks and benefits, and their right to withdraw. Non-refugee participants however (i.e. UN representative, camp guide, and translator) provided written consent following standard academic protocols.

Beyond university approval, the research required permission from Jordan's Ministry of Interior to access Zaatari and Azraq camps. These approvals ensured compliance with host country regulations and international protocols for research in humanitarian settings. The study design minimised potential harm while maximising benefits for participants and the broader refugee community.

4.6.2. Data Management and Protection

A data management plan covered secure handling of research materials. Standalone recording devices were used for audio recordings to maintain control over data security and deletion. Data was stored on university-approved servers with backup systems. Data will be retained for three years after collection or two years after final publication, whichever is longer. Multiple site visits and triangulation validated findings and ensured accurate representation of participants' experiences. Data protection followed UK Data Protection Act 2018 and University of Leeds guidelines. Identifying information was separated from responses, with coded identifiers stored in encrypted files. Pseudonyms protected participant identities in all research outputs while allowing meaningful analysis.

4.6.3. Use of Generative AI

This research used generative AI tools following the University of Leeds ethical framework (University of Leeds, 2025), with permitted use in the AMBER category (Appendix A). I completed mandatory Generative AI training on 14 October 2025.

AI tools had specific roles as earlier discussed. Claude (Anthropic) cleaned up interview transcripts by removing filler words and correcting transcription errors, translated Arabic content into English, and assisted with retrieving first-order expressions (i.e. interviewee quotes) to support theme formulation during data analysis. The field Arabic translator verified all translations for accuracy and cultural appropriateness against Modern Standard Arabic (MSA). Microsoft Copilot, accessed through the University's enterprise license, assisted with

proofreading draft chapters and converting references to Leeds Harvard format. All data shared with AI tools complied with ethical approval conditions, UK Data Protection Act 2018, and Jordan's data protection regulations. I remained aware of AI limitations, such as potential biases, inaccuracies, and lack of contextual understanding (Appendix A). Translation required particular care to capture cultural nuances, idiomatic expressions, and context-specific terminology.

4.7. Chapter Summary

This chapter outlined the study's methodological framework across four dimensions. Philosophically, Critical Realism provided the ontological foundation, with its stratified model of reality facilitating retroductive reasoning from observed outcomes to underlying causal mechanisms. Methodologically, a comparative case study design was employed, with Zaatari and Azraq selected as theoretical polar types sharing common antecedents but producing divergent entrepreneurial outcomes. A pilot study in Calais and Dunkirk refined interview protocols and established the value of multi-perspective triangulation. Methodically, data collection combined naturalistic data, participant observation, and 48 semi-structured interviews across refugee entrepreneurs, UN representatives, camp guides, and translators. Analytically, Stones' context-conduct framework guided systematic coding across enabling-constraining and transformative-reproductive dimensions, positioning Zaatari as enabling-transformative and Azraq as constraining-reproductive. The mechanisms producing these divergent outcomes are explicated in the subsequent chapters.

CHAPTER 5: CONTEXT ANALYSIS

5.0. Introduction

The previous chapter established the study's four-dimensional methodological framework, comprising philosophical, methodological, data collection, and analytical dimensions. Building on this, the next two chapters demonstrate how the analytical dimension was implemented, specifically focusing on the thematic coding structures applied to the interview data, fieldwork notes, and naturalistic data in both context and conduct analyses. The analysis chapters are split into context and conduct to distinguish between the situational conditions that shape possibilities for action (context) and the actual practices and interactions observed within these conditions (conduct).

The first of these chapters examines context analysis, which focuses on the environmental and structural factors that influence RE, presenting aggregate themes through the duality of enabling and constraining dimensions (Giddens, 1984; Stones, 2005). The study's case-associated themes for the frame of context analysis are outlined in Figure 15, demonstrating comparisons across the theoretical sample of Case 1 (Zaatari) and Case 2 (Azraq).

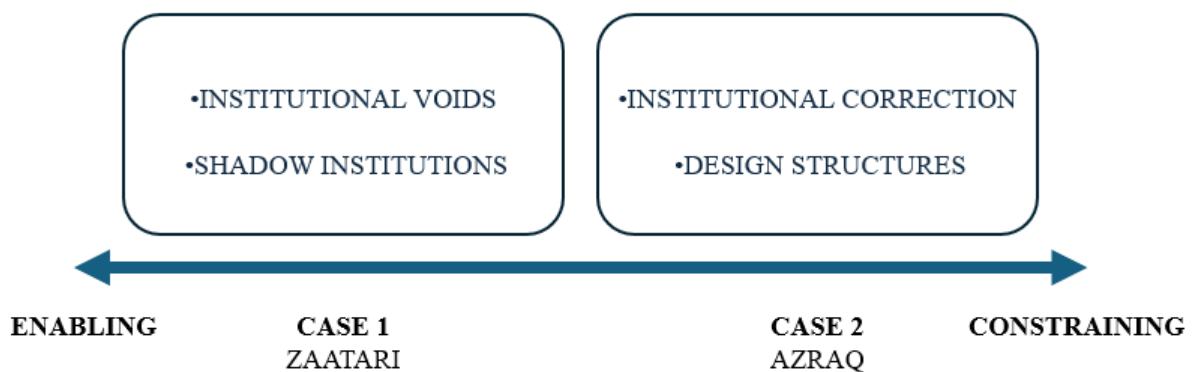


Figure 15: Enabling-Constraining Spectrum: Context Analysis

In this study, the analysis reveals how institutional structures and policies function along an enabling-constraining spectrum that influences entrepreneurship agency. Specifically, the predominantly enabling dimensions in Case 1 created structural conditions and environmental factors conducive to entrepreneurial activity in Zaatari, while the predominantly constraining dimensions in Case 2 limited refugees' ability to implement innovative practices due to corrective measures and resource limitations subsequently applied in Azraq. Yet both camps exhibit elements of constraint and enablement, varying primarily in degree.

Cross-case analysis is a useful tool for theory building as it enables researchers to look beyond the unit of singularity, thus seeking multiple perspectives to obtain unique theoretical insights (Eisenhardt, 2021). Initial examination of naturalistic data, specifically the UNHCR dashboard, highlighted notable anomalies between the cases, particularly Zaatari's higher entrepreneurial activity compared to Azraq. The subsequent analysis confirmed and expanded upon these observed differences, empirically substantiating that Case 1 and Case 2 operate at different points along the enabling-constraining spectrum. Thus, Case 1 demonstrated substantially more enabling characteristics conducive to entrepreneurship, while Case 2 exhibited predominantly constraining features that limited entrepreneurial development. This empirically verified positioning, initially suggested by UNHCR metrics but developed through comparative analysis, provides a framework for understanding how contextual factors function on this continuum and explains the entrepreneurial disparities observed in the preliminary data.

A further utility of cross-case analysis is to improve the creativity and reliability of the overall analysis (Eisenhardt, 2021). According to Eisenhardt, this process concerns explaining the 'why' behind the surfacing of theoretical constructs. This is particularly important for understanding how deviations arise in spite of commonalities across cases, thus helping to accentuate theoretical nuance. Thus, through comparing patterns and themes across cases, both similarities and differences are routinely surfaced, thereby helping to highlight the underlying mechanisms that generate these patterns (Welch, et al., 2011; Yin, 2014).

In the following sections, the aggregate themes associated with the *enabling dimension* are discussed, *Institutional Voids* and the role of *Shadow Institutions* representing themes predominately associated with Case 1. Next, the aggregate themes relating to the *constraining dimension* are then presented, introducing the concept of *Institutional Correction* and the notion of *Design Structures*, thereby exhibiting the prevailing themes associated in Case 2.

5.1. ENABLING THEMES

The enabling themes within this section represent the external forces that fostered entrepreneurial agency despite challenging circumstances. In the case of Zaatari, institutional Voids - defined as the absence of formal market structures, regulatory frameworks, and support systems (Mair and Marti, 2009), created structural openings for refugee camp entrepreneurs to exploit. Subsequently, these voids were 'occupied' by Shadow Institutions - informal yet structured systems that capitalised on the latency of formal structures, thus fulfilling the functions typically absent in these institutional voids. This concept of 'Shadow Institutions' has been developed as a new theoretical construct based on the findings and analysis of this study, representing a key contribution to understanding how informal structures emerge to replace formal institutional functions in refugee camp contexts.

Combined, these elements constitute the enabling forces that catalyse rather than hinder entrepreneurial activity in the case of Zaatari. Importantly, these enabling factors emerged from what would traditionally be viewed as constraints, illustrating how institutional limitations can paradoxically create spaces for refugee agency when mediated through shadow institutions. This perspective reveals an enabling-constraining spectrum where institutional factors can function as either enablers or constrainters of entrepreneurial agency depending on context, timing, and entrepreneurial response, rather than existing as fixed binary categories. Figure 16 provides the outline coding structure for the enabling dimension thereby highlighting the relevant aggregate themes, second order and first order thematic underpinnings (Gioia, 2021).

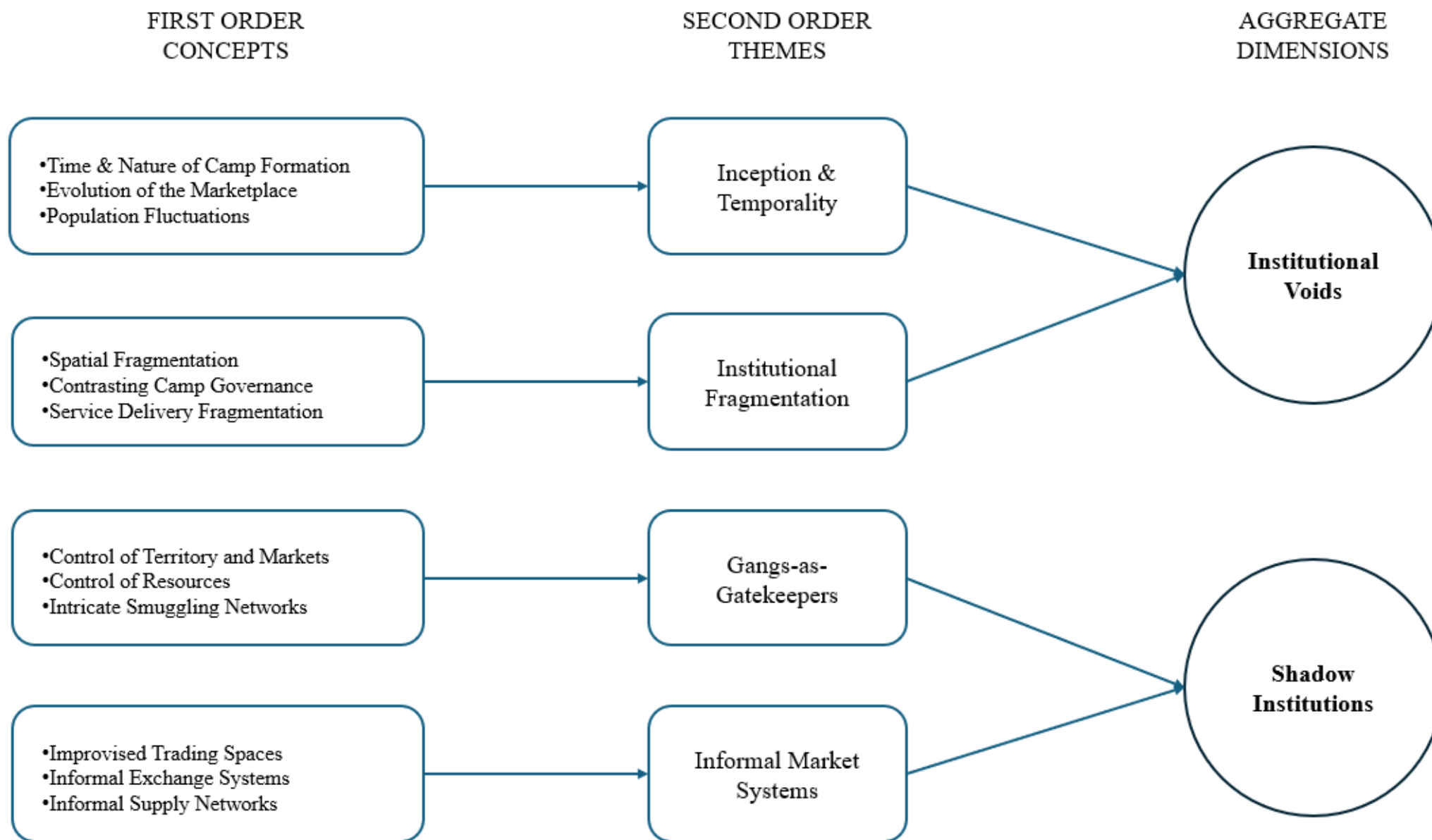


Figure 16: Enabling themes within the frame of Context Analysis

Accordingly, the following sections deconstruct both *institutional voids* and *shadow institutions* to surface their specific mechanisms and how they function as enabling forces within the camp's entrepreneurial ecosystem.

5.1.1. INSTITUTIONAL VOIDS

The dimension of institutional voids describes how the SRAD and UNHCR's initial preoccupation with humanitarian concerns in Zaatari (Case 1) created subsequent spaces for refugee agency to exploit. As one UN official recounts: *"We were just trying to get people shelter... you didn't have the capacity at that time to try to organise things... Because of that, they created this market"* [UN-UP]. This structural void became manifest through two second-order themes: the notion of *inception and temporality*, and the concept of *institutional fragmentation*.

5.1.1.1. Inception and Temporality

The concept of inception and temporality illustrates how the circumstances and timing of the first camp; Zaatari, subsequently led to atypical conditions for refugee agency to flourish. Unlike planned refugee settlements like Azraq (Case 2), Zaatari emerged during the start of the Syrian civil war in 2012, where the host nation of Jordan and the UNHCR's capacity was overwhelmed by the daily influx of refugees. Ultimately this strain led to the notion of institutional distraction leading refugees to shape their environment prior to more formal control mechanisms could be implemented. Thus, timing proved to be a crucial element to the upsurge of refugee agency in Zaatari specifically. In sum, the theme of inception and temporality was underpinned by several first order concepts, namely the *timing and nature of the camp's formation*, the *evolution of the marketplaces*, and the associated *population flux* between camps.

5.1.1.1.1. Timing and Nature of Camp Formation

Beginning with the concept of time and the nature of the camp's establishment under emergency conditions, informant-based comments were homogeneously attributed to the former UN urban planner: *"because [Zaatari] emerged during the beginning of the crisis... it happened organically"* [UN-UP]. The interviewee further implied the UN were blindsided to the economic needs of Zaatari's refugees owing to the emergency conditions: *"We were just*

trying to get people shelter. Because of that, they created this market" [UN-UP]. The interviewee conceded: *"...by the time government caught up, it was like too late... [the refugees] already created this market"*. This appeared to lead to the acknowledgement that Zaatari: *"...was really hard to manage..."*, juxtaposing it to Azraq's contrasting origin story: *"whereas the Azraq camp, because it was pre planned... there was a lot more structure"*. Essentially, the timing and nature of Zaatari's inception created a critical window where the convergence of humanitarian crisis management coupled with administrative strain inadvertently enabled refugee agency in one location, yet prompted institutional learning that would later inform Azraq's unique development.

The early administration of the camps by UNHCR was characterised by significant structural deficiencies, creating a power vacuum that affected governance. Evidence of this phenomenon was derived from both primary and secondary informant-based sources. Primary data derived from the UN official alluded to Zaatari's organic market street formation owing to the institutional vacuum: *"people decided to put it that way (market street design)... by the time I think the government and UNHCR caught up, it was too late (to change the design)"* [UN-UP]. She further noted the associated by-products of this institutional vacuum *"...it was really hard to manage... there started to [appear] be these like dynamic, almost like mafia gangs."* [UN-UP]. Secondary or naturalistic data confirmed the UNHCR's struggle to manage the first camp (Zaatari), owing to the daily influx of refugees following the advent of the Syrian war: *"...the daily flow of new refugees hit 4000...the UNHCR, ran out of manpower"* [ND-2]. Due to deficiencies in the initial administration of the camp, *"...Zataari became a lawless place"* [ND-2]. In the following year, the UNHCR hired the services of Kilian Kleinschmidt (camp manager), *"to rescue Zaatari from chaos"* [ND-1].

Fundamentally, the UNHCR's limited capacity during the initial humanitarian crisis subsequently led to significant institutional voids that unintentionally enabled refugee agency to emerge in Zaatari, amidst the backdrop of chaos. However, as the UN interviewee remarked, lessons were derived from Zaatari's perceived anarchy which later informed policy at shaping subsequent camps: *"I remember there was this document that everyone was talking about, like the lessons learned from Zaatari"* [UN-UP].

5.1.1.1.2. *The Evolution of the Marketplaces*

Naturalistic data describes the early marketplace structures that emerged in the commercial spaces of the Zaatari camp: *"At first, the shopkeepers operated from tents. Then, when the UNHCR provided wooden caravans for the refugees to live in, the entrepreneurs got hold of these and cut the sides out and created small kiosks"* [ND-2]. Primary data further attested to the resourcefulness of the camp's inhabitants: *"they [refugees] created not only the marketplace, but they actually built it... they took all the containers that were being distributed"* [UN-UP]. By the time the Zaatari camp was just two years old in 2014, *"...it had over 1400 businesses"*, peaking at *"3,000 businesses"* [ND-2] shortly before the second camp (Azraq), was commissioned in 2014. However, the recent interview with the UN representative in 2023 indicated the number of registered businesses in Zaatari to be *"1,800 businesses"* [UN-UP], in line with the UNHCR's official dashboard data (UNHCR, 2020). Thus, this mismatch may be attributed to the polarity of registered vs unregistered businesses, different counting methods between sources or the type of business operations (i.e. formal vs informal).

In comparison, the marketplace in the Azraq camp holds a total of 375 registered businesses according to official UNHCR data (UNHCR, 2020). While Zaatari's marketplace appeared to emerge immediately once the camp was formed, the case of Azraq exhibited a more protracted form of marketplace development as indicated by the UN personnel: *"...it took quite a while actually for the market spaces to open (in Azraq). I remember there was a big [gap] ...I'm going to have to estimate, but I remember leaving in 2015, and I think it was maybe two years later that the markets finally opened [in Azraq]"* [UN-UP]. In essence, the protracted timeline for implementing market spaces in Azraq reflects a deliberate institutional approach to controlling refugee enterprise, contrasting sharply with Zaatari's organic market development.

5.1.1.1.3. *Population Movements*

Concerning the notion of population movements, this refers to how population flux fundamentally contributed to the asymmetrical emergence of institutional voids between the two camps. Data derived from the UNHCR dashboard points to a significant difference between camps, with Zaatari hosting approximately 80,000 refugees while Azraq holds around 41,000 refugees (UNHCR, 2023). The interview with the former UN employee further confirmed this population difference: *"I am aware of the disparity in terms of the population..."*

it being double (than Azraq) approximately 80,000" [UN-UP]. The study's independent translator further attested to the population split between camps: "Zaatari had more people (than Azraq)... That's why it has more life" [TL], implying Zaatari to be more vibrant than its sister camp. Crucially, naturalistic data indicated that Zaatari's peak population was much higher in its early infancy: "By April 2013, it had grown to over 200,000 people and became the biggest and fastest growing refugee camp in the world" [ND-2], with this being significantly reduced "with other camps (e.g. Azraq) opening to relieve population pressures in Zaatari by 2016 the population fell to 80,000" [ND-2].

This paradoxical situation emerged as the unprecedented speed and scale of population growth in Zaatari overwhelmed administrative capacity, seemingly creating persistent institutional voids that were only partially alleviated despite later corrections, while these same lessons enabled fully healing such voids in Azraq's more controlled environment. Thus, Azraq, benefiting from lessons learned and more controlled population inflow, appeared to be designed specifically to prevent such voids from forming. The strategic creation of Azraq as a spillover camp thus reveals how population management became a mechanism for institutional void prevention, while simultaneously explaining why such voids remained stubbornly present in Zaatari despite administrative awareness of their existence.

5.1.1.2. Institutional Fragmentation

Relating to the second underpinning theme, institutional fragmentation refers to the splintering of governance that positioned differently along the enabling-constraining spectrum in each camp. In Zaatari, this fragmentation inadvertently created spaces for entrepreneurial agency, while in Azraq, similar fragmentation manifested more restrictively. This illustrates how the same institutional factor can function at different points on the spectrum depending on time and place. The lack of coordinated oversight meant that even private donors could undermine the UNHCR's administrative remit, thereby creating institutional gaps that refugees could exploit for entrepreneurial purposes in Zaatari, while these same gaps were more effectively managed in Azraq. In sum, relative first order concepts associated with this second order theme involve the notions of *spatial differences*, *contrasting systems of governance*, and *service delivery fragmentation*.

5.1.1.2.1. Spatial Differences

Spatially, both camps and their respective locations were geographically opposed. Zaatari is located in the Mafraq governate in northern Jordan, approximately 10 kilometres from the Jordanian-Syrian border, while the Azraq camp was positioned in the east of Jordan in an arid plain within the Zarqa governate. The study's translator commented the following about Azraq's seemingly isolated location: *"Azraq was in the middle of the desert. It's an abandoned place. There are no cities around it"* [TL]. The former UN employee noted, *"it's huge (Azraq). And it's very hot and there's very little shaded area in between the villages"* [UN-UP]. When quizzed about the clear disparity between locations and layouts, the former UN representative responded, *"the reason [Azraq] is set up like this... they felt that it [Zaatari] was, too centralised (i.e. market street architecture, line of shops). So the way that the market was designed, the government found it too centralised, too difficult for them in general to kind of manage and monitor"* [UN-UP], resulting in *"every village (at Azraq) having their own market"* as remarked by the camp guide [CG]. However, Azraq's refugee entrepreneurs appeared to critique the Azraq layout: *"The market there (Zaatari) is different from the market here (Azraq), because here every village has its own market, and some people cannot find your shop or find it difficult to remember its location. But in Zaatari, the market is in one place and in one line, like the markets outside. It is easier for people to find shops"* [RE8-A]. Thus, the strategic fragmentation of space through segregated villages in Azraq, contrasted sharply with Zaatari's more integrated and linear layout, reflecting fundamentally different approaches to camp governance and control.

The implications of these spatial differences significantly impacted entrepreneurial opportunity. Hence, Zaatari's centralised market created beneficial multiplier effects, thus enhancing customer flow and business interactions. This spatial integration formed a conducive entrepreneurial ecosystem where all businesses benefited from increased visibility and accessibility. Conversely, Azraq's fragmented layout constrained these benefits by compartmentalising business activity across four separate villages, limiting customer awareness and reducing knowledge transfer between entrepreneurs. This spatial arrangement effectively contained entrepreneurial activity, preventing the formation of a unified market identity and limiting the development of the integrated commercial networks that emerged in Zaatari. The contrasting spatial strategies thus represent distinct governance approaches with direct consequences for entrepreneurial agency in each camp.

5.1.1.2.2. *Contrasting Systems of Governance*

While there were clear spatial differences between camps, there were also obvious differences in the camps individual governance systems. Whilst full access was granted to myself and the fieldwork team to access Zaatari's marketspaces, only limited access was granted in the Azraq camp as revealed in the researcher fieldnotes, "*Villages 2 and 5 - we were not allowed to enter because they (the refugees) don't have security checks*" [RD]. The former UN employee recounted "*...it was village 5...There was one particular village that was actually fenced off from the rest... it was the village that they would put people in if they had kind of suspicions about their backgrounds or they were still going through some security check or background check*". While the UN interviewee appeared to provide generic references to the inhabitant's backgrounds, naturalistic data surrounding the mystery of Village 5 revealed, "*...it is a huge open pen surrounded by secure fencing and used to hold refugees, including children arriving from towns known to be ISIS strongholds.*" [ND-2].



Figure 17: Fortification and isolation of Village 5, Azraq

Furthermore, UNHCR dashboard data revealed that 8% of Azraq's inhabitants (UNHCR, 2023), were known to originate from Ar-Raqqa in Syria, the former capital of the so-called ISIS state. Figure 17 illustrates an image taken from the fieldwork demonstrating Village 5's clear ostracisation from the rest of the camp. Moreover, this ostracisation highlights a further within-camp layer of spatial disparity, with Village 5 essentially becoming a mini camp within a greater refugee camp.

There were also clear contrasts in the commercial operations between camps. In Zaatari, refugees had complete monopoly of their respective marketplaces, however at Azraq, "*...they ended up doing a system where every kiosk and every business that opened up had to be somehow co-owned by a Jordanian and a Syrian*" [UN-UP]. When asked about the purpose of this initiative, the UN official responded, "*it was to try to deal with these frustrations that some Jordanians were having: refugees are taking our jobs*" [UN-UP]. While this initiative was rolled out in Azraq from its inception, there appeared to be no attempts to introduce this venture in the more established Zaatari camp "*for fear of uproar and repercussions*" [RF].

The implications of these divergent policies substantially shaped entrepreneurial agency and autonomy. The refugee-owned businesses in Zaatari therefore enabled full profit retention, independent decision-making, and the development of businesses that reflected refugee needs and preferences. This autonomy fostered genuine ownership over their entrepreneurial ventures, thus strengthening refugees' sense of agency and self-determination. Conversely, Azraq's mandated co-ownership structure compromised refugee's financial returns, decision-making authority, and ultimately their occupational identity. This structural subordination therefore limited their ability to develop authentic entrepreneurial approaches, instead creating a form of partial entrepreneurship where refugees contributed labour and market knowledge while Jordanian partners often controlled critical resources and business strategies. The resulting power imbalance effectively transformed what might have been independent entrepreneurs into quasi-employees within ostensibly co-owned ventures, fundamentally altering the relationship between entrepreneurial activity and agency in ways that reinforced rather than challenged institutional dependencies.

Essentially, these contrasting governance approaches reflect the fundamental differences in how the two camps were conceived, developed, and managed. This divergence was particularly evident in how services and aid were delivered within each camp's distinct organisational framework.

5.1.1.2.3. Service Delivery Fragmentation

Secondary interview data highlighted contrasting approaches to service delivery between camps revealed striking differences in humanitarian coordination and control. At Zaatari, the initial uncoordinated aid efforts led to a chaotic and often inefficient distribution of resources.

This was exemplified by Zaatari's former camp manager, Killian Kleinschmidt: *"Private donors from Saudi Arabia brought in several hundred residential trailers without discussing it with my team first"* [ND-1]. Kleinschmidt further referred to the plethora of *"139 organisations"* operating haphazardly in Zaatari throughout his tenure, including seemingly random initiatives such as a *"Dutch guitar group"* whose purpose remained unclear considering Zaatari's largely orthodox Muslim community.

In contrast, Azraq's service delivery was characterised by rigid control and fragmentation of aid distribution. The camp's strict security measures and geographic isolation made it *"much harder to smuggle"* [ND-2] unlike Zaatari's porous borders where refugees would openly admit to being involved in smuggling operations: *"..I brought it [machine] in without a permit by throwing it over the fence, and then I got a permit afterward"* [RE14-Z]. Furthermore, Azraq employed a strict digital wallet system preventing refugees from transferring cash between wallets, meaning aid money designated for specific purposes like food could not be repurposed for other essential needs like clothing. This restricted financial agency was further reinforced by a system designed to channel money *"directly from the donors to the supermarket owners without passing through the refugees' hands"* [ND-2]. In essence, these divergent approaches to service delivery, highlighted how humanitarian aid management can swing between extremes of chaos and over-regulation, both potentially undermining refugee agency and resource efficiency.

5.1.2. SHADOW INSTITUTIONS

Shadow institutions, defined in this study as systems that operate outside official frameworks yet maintain consistent internal organisation, became a key theoretical dimension in this analysis. These shadow institutions developed specifically within Zaatari to fill the earlier described institutional voids, thereby enabling refugee entrepreneurial agency in this specific location. Their informality stems from their lack of official recognition, thus absent from formal policy and operation owing to regulatory oversight. Yet they displayed structured characteristics through their patterns of interaction, recognised roles, shared understanding of rules, and consistent enforcement mechanisms. For example, the informal trade networks connecting the camp to external markets operated without official sanction (i.e. informality) while maintaining established routes, trusted intermediaries, and consistent pricing systems (i.e. structure). Similarly, informal credit systems lacked legal recognition from authorities yet

followed standard practices for determining economic value. This dual nature allowed shadow institutions to adapt quickly to changing conditions while providing the reliability and predictability typically associated with formal institutions, thus creating a hybrid organisational form uniquely suited to Zaatari's environment. Unlike formal governance structures, these shadow institutions operated through unofficial channels of influence, resource allocation, and social organisation that proved crucial for entrepreneurial activities. As the UNHCR focused on basic shelter provision, parallel underground governance systems subsequently arose from the camp's inhabitants as reported by the former UN employee "*..there started to [appear] these dynamic, almost like mafia gangs.*" [UN-UP]. These groups effectively became the de facto governance structure before formal control could be established, as exemplified by the statement, "*by the time government caught up, it was too late*" [UN-UP]. Concerning the nature of these shadow institutions, these can be conceptualised by two second-order themes, the concept of *gangs-as-gatekeepers* and the notion of *informal market systems*.

5.1.2.1. Gangs-as-Gatekeepers

The subdimension of gangs-as-gatekeepers initially emerged during a remote interview with a former UN urban planner who made direct reference to the nature of these gangs: "*When Zaatari first opened, it was really hard to manage. It left more vulnerable people struggling. For example, single women had it harder because there started to be a dynamic like mafias - certain areas of the camp controlled by certain people, mostly men, who just asserted control. I don't want to paint a rosy picture of how Zaatari emerged during the crisis.*" This institutional perspective highlighted how underground figures had taken advantage of an apparent institutional void to establish territorial control of the camp and marketplace while humanitarian organisations were focused on more immediate concerns such as shelter provision.

However, when I subsequently attempted to explore this phenomenon directly with camp residents, security limitations prevented deeper investigation. During fieldwork, only one refugee participant (RE14-Z) briefly alluded to underground activities taking place before I was prevented from pursuing this line of inquiry further. This security intervention itself became a significant data point, revealing how knowledge about certain activities is controlled within the camp environment. A further example of the reality of this censorship could be seen in the translator's statement discussing their experience of interviewing refugee entrepreneurs

in the presence of security personnel: *"Shadi [police escort] used to listen very closely and monitor our questions. When we asked the engineer [for example] about his time in the [Syrian] army, I saw him waving at me to stop this question. Having a [police] guide with a police car made some [refugees] scared from saying a lot of things"* [TL]. Thus, rather than abandoning this critical theme that had been indicated by both institutional sources, resident testimony, and fieldwork notes (i.e. translators' statement) I employed methodological triangulation to develop a more comprehensive understanding of how these gangs seemingly exploited Zaatari's institutional voids. Thus, supplementary secondary data from media accounts that documented similar patterns in the camp was used to further augment this second-order theme. In sum, the following first order concepts supported this theme: the gang's utility of *intricate smuggling networks*, their influence and *control of territory & markets* and their influence on *controlling key resources*.

5.1.2.1.1. Intricate Smuggling Networks

Both primary and secondary sources revealed extensive smuggling operations in the Zaatari camp, operating at individual and organisational levels. At the individual-level, a refugee store owner candidly discussed his smuggling activities with the research team: *"I needed it for my work, so I brought it [machine] in without a permit by throwing it over the fence, and then I got a permit afterward"* [RE14-Z].

The camp's physical layout appeared to facilitate such activities, with research fieldnotes highlighting Zaatari's minimal buffer zone: *"When Shadi [police escort] picked us up from the entrance at Azraq, we had to drive maybe half a kilo into the camp, whereas [in] Zaatari, as soon as we got through the barrier... I could [literally] throw a stone into the marketplace"* [RF]. Moreover, the research team discussed this further when corroborating their experiences of camp fieldwork: *"The reason that he could smuggle these things in Zaatari was because the camp security was not good, like the tents and caravans, were very close to the fence"* [RF]. This proximity to the outside world contrasted sharply with Azraq's isolation effectively immunising against the advent of smuggling. Secondary data further confirmed Zaatari's porous borders, noting that *"Unlike at the main gate, there is no barbed wire, and there are no guards or checkpoints beyond the ring road"* [ND-2].



Figure 18: "I brought it [machine] in without a permit by throwing it over the fence, and then I got a permit afterward" [RE14-Z].

At the organisational-level, these networks exploited the e-card system by converting digital aid into hard cash through a sophisticated loophole: *"Families buy a large bag of powdered milk for 9 dinars on their e-card and sell it immediately to a smuggler for seven dinars in cash. The smuggler then slips out of the camp past the SRAD guards and resells the milk for 8 dinars to Jordanians. Once the dealing is done, the Jordanian outside the camp has saved a dinar on milk, buying at 8 rather than 9 dinars...And the smuggler has made a dinar by buying at 7 and selling at 8"* [ND-2]. However, this practice was unique to Zaatari, as Azraq's isolated location and stricter security measures prevented similar smuggling networks from emerging. Therefore, the amalgam of neighbouring civilian areas coupled with malleable borders and syndicate gangs, appeared to externally enable the exportation of humanitarian aid beyond the camp confines in exchange for cash.

5.1.2.1.2. *Control of Territory & Markets*

While the interview with the former UN employee did not go into operational intricacies of these gangs, Kleinschmidt's interview (secondary data) however provided specific detail into the operational realm of these underground figures. Kleinschmidt recalled his interaction with one of the camp's power brokers, known by the pseudonym Abu Hussein: *"I control 21 streets. My men patrol day and night"* [ND-1]. According to Kleinschmidt, Abu Hussein was able to amass significant control of the camp's commercial spaces, *"I have 10 barbers [shops] who will give free shaves to anyone who wants one"*. In his interview, Kleinschmidt described his intimidating interactions with Abu Hussein through the following example: *"If I wanted to, I could have the entire camp burning in five minutes"* [Abu Hussein]. Regarding these informal power structures, Kleinschmidt concluded, *"They want police to fear entering the camp, so that the mafia can go about its business without interruption"*. This account therefore illustrates how informal power structures emerged in Zaatari's early days, creating parallel governance systems that effectively challenged official camp management figures. Through their control of territory and market spaces, these groups were able to extend their influence over the camp's vital resources.

5.1.2.1.3. *Control of Resources*

The UN official explicitly described how these gangs exerted comprehensive dominance over the camp: *"it was really hard to manage...they kind of just asserted control over everything"* [UN-UP]. Secondary accounts further revealed that these gangs sought to expand their control over the camp's infrastructure, particularly its electricity supply, for financial gain. As one source noted, *"they want to prevent the aid organisations from installing a power grid, so that they can continue to sell illegally tapped electricity"* [ND-1]. This exploitation extended even to critical facilities, with Kleinschmidt observing that *"The air-conditioner runs with electricity he is tapping from the Italian hospital"*, demonstrating a disregard for the camp's most vulnerable residents. The UN official further expressed concern about how this anarchic environment threatened aid delivery, noting *"part of the fear was, you know, what would that mean for the services that the NGO's were providing [to the most vulnerable]?"*. In sum, this system of informal resource control and exploitation of vulnerable populations created ideal conditions for an underground economy to flourish, with smuggling networks ostensibly becoming a by-product of this phenomenon.

5.1.2.2. Informal Market Systems

The concept of informal market systems effectively highlights how refugees at the Zaatari camp specifically were able to develop alternative market infrastructures in direct response to the institutional voids that characterised the camp's early development. These systems represent a practical manifestation of shadow institutions filling specific market-related voids. Therefore, where formal market infrastructures were seemingly wanting due to institutional voids in regulatory frameworks and economic governance, refugees appeared to establish their own bespoke informal infrastructures as adaptive responses. This illustrates how institutional voids, rather than simply constraining economic activity, created spaces where alternative systems could emerge. In sum, the conception of informal market systems can be underpinned by the following first order concepts: *improvised trading spaces*, *informal monetary exchange systems*, and *informal supply networks*.

5.1.2.2.1. Improvised Trading Spaces

While the case of Azraq exemplified careful pre-planning and strategic execution by institutional powers, the case of Zaatari embodied a bottom-up perspective where its refugees demonstrated pseudo-architecture, thus effectively designing and shaping the camp's commercial zones, *"they [refugee gangs] created this market... by the time the government caught up, it was too late"* [UN-UP]. The former UN employee further remarked *"they took all the containers that were being distributed, and they would shape them as they wanted"*.

Furthermore, naturalistic data further confirmed the propensity for improvised agency in the Zaatari camp, *"...when the UNHCR provided wooden caravans for the refugees to live in, the entrepreneurs got hold of these cut the sides out and created small kiosks"* [ND-2]. Moreover, photographic images derived from the study's fieldwork notes illustrated a myriad of improvised structures designed and built for commercial use. These ranged from fixed premises (Figure 19) to more bespoke and mobile pop-up structures (Figures 20: (a) and (b)). Essentially, these examples of DIY architectural agency, enabled refugees to transform residential units into commercial spaces, exemplifying how Zaatari's inhabitants shaped their economic environment. This informal claiming of space laid the groundwork for alternative economic exchange systems to emerge within the camp.



Figure 19: Converted wooden caravan into retail unit



Figures 20: Customised mobile coffee cart (a), and bespoke wagon for produce transportation (b)

5.1.2.2.2. Informal Exchange Systems

The improvised agency of these shadow institutions also extended into the camp's economic exchange systems. While this comprised the intricate smuggling ring in Zaatari as previously cited, *"Families buy a large bag of powdered milk for 9 dinars on their e-card and sell it immediately to a smuggler for seven dinars in cash"* [ND-2], other tertiary forms of informal exchange mechanisms emerged within the camps as observed by the UN participant, *"They created some sort of system where people could provide services to each other without money, for example, you cut my hair. I'll fix your sink... rather than exchanging money for goods, you exchange goods for goods or services for goods or services for services"* [UN-UP]. Secondary sources further refer to this exchange economy, *"We have tinned beef which we don't want. We don't have shampoo, which we do want - the kids help make the exchange"* [ND-2].

However, in the case of Azraq, there appeared to be institutional resistance to the notion of these informal exchanges as reported by one refugee, *"Time-banking was about exchanging hours of work instead of money...they told us to stop...they said the project doesn't work for them"* [RE1-A]. When asking the former UN employee regarding the censure of these systems, particularly in Azraq, she alluded to the actualisation of structural anxiety, whereby refugees developing self-sufficient systems may reduce refugee dependency on NGO's, *"Maybe part of the fear was, you know, what would that mean for the services that the NGO's were supposed to be providing? Are they not going to need those? "You'd think that they want [refugees] to be empowered, but actually there's a lot of politics involved"*. Thus, the contrasting institutional contexts - unintentional voids (Zaatari) versus intentional micro-management (Azraq) - highlighted how the camps' different governance approaches created fundamentally different conditions for informal economic activity.

5.1.2.2.3. Informal Supply Networks

The informal supply chains within Zaatari appeared to occur through unscrupulous means, operating through both internal and external actors. While some supply routes were officially permitted by institutional stakeholders, such as the work permit scheme *"...(refugees) can go out from the camp with legal documentation, they can go for 14 days (at a time)"* [CG], thereby enabling refugees to repatriate goods into the camp, others manifested through more covert means, with refugees admitting to smuggling goods as earlier described e.g. RE14-Z.

Externally, informal networks were further facilitated by local communities who provided crucial transportation services for the area's refugees, "*Bedouin farmers who live in the nearby town [Mafrqa] own pickup trucks and use them to perform an informal taxi bus service inside the camp*" [ND-2]. Moreover, these networks further performed a humanitarian function, thus serving vulnerable populations within the camp, as evidenced by mobile vendors: "*Carts carrying fruit and vegetables can be seen travelling the outer streets selling produce to those who are too old or injured to walk to the market*" [ND-2]. Meanwhile in Azraq, its geographical isolation, strict perimeter control, and regimented commercial structure effectively inhibited the emergence of such networks from forming, thus demonstrating how institutional design could curtail organic economic activity.

5.2. CONSTRAINING THEMES

The constraining themes within this section represent the external forces that appeared to limit entrepreneurial agency through deliberate institutional design and intervention. In the case of Azraq, *Institutional Correction* - defined as the calculated attempt to rectify perceived structural shortcomings observed in Zaatari - resulted in a more controlled environment with fewer opportunities for autonomous entrepreneurial activity. These corrections manifested through *Design Structures* - purpose-built physical and administrative frameworks that restricted the emergence of informal economic activities. Combined, these elements constitute the constraining forces that regulate rather than foster entrepreneurial activity in the case of Azraq. Importantly, these constraining factors emerged from what would traditionally be viewed as improvements in camp management, illustrating how institutional enhancements can paradoxically restrict spaces for refugee agency when implemented without consideration for entrepreneurial needs. This perspective further demonstrates the enabling-constraining spectrum where institutional factors shift along a continuum depending on their implementation, timing, and context, rather than functioning as inherently positive or negative elements. Figure 21 provides the coding framework for the constraining dimension thereby positing the relevant aggregate themes, their second order and first order thematic underpinnings (Gioia, 2021).

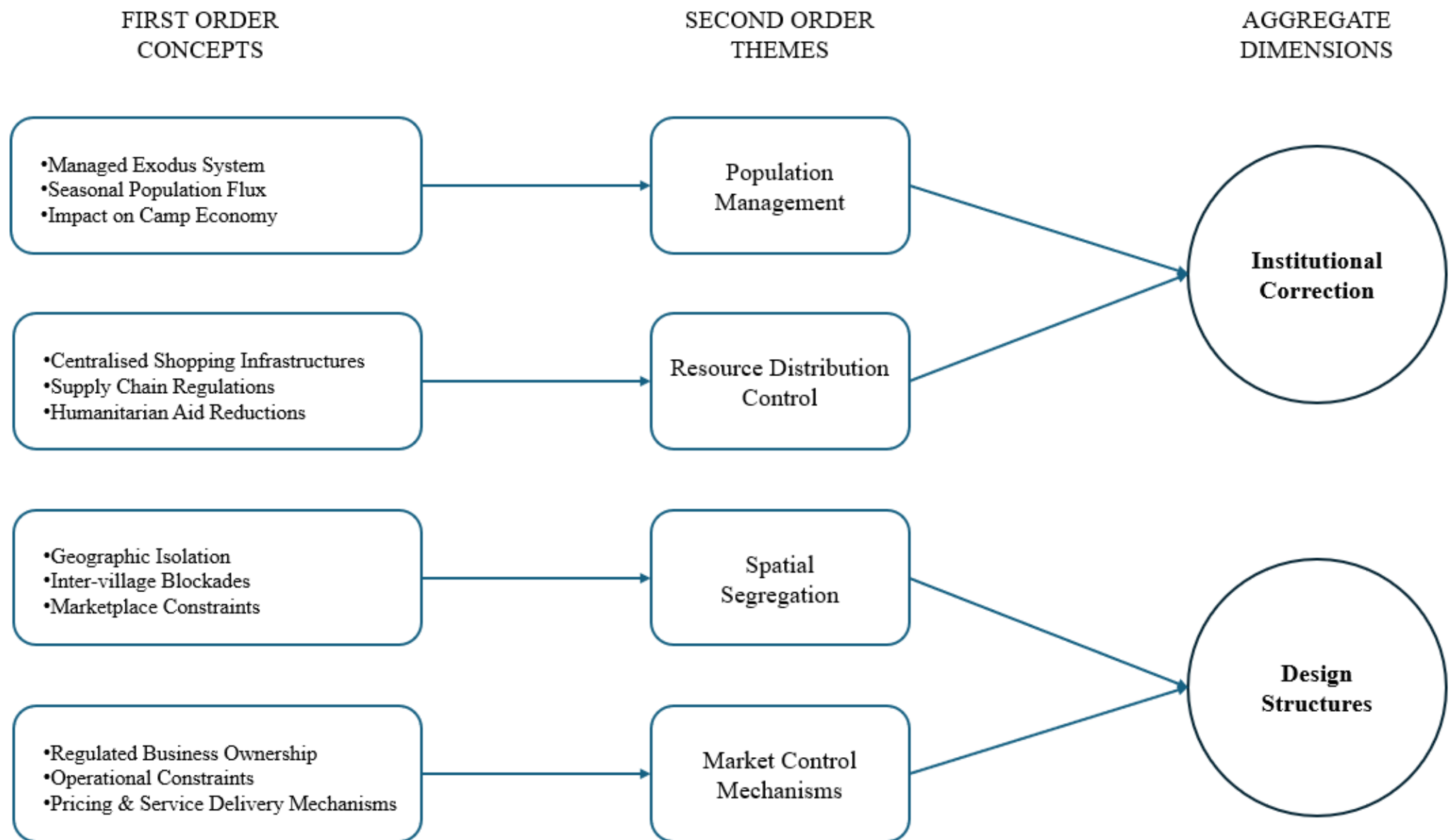


Figure 21: Constraining themes within the frame of Context Analysis

Accordingly, the following sections deconstruct both *institutional correction* and *design structures* to surface their specific mechanisms and how they function as constraining forces within the camp's entrepreneurial ecosystem.

5.2.1. INSTITUTIONAL CORRECTION

The constraining dimension of institutional correction symbolises a calculated attempt by institutional powers to rectify the perceived structural shortcomings that emerged in Zaatari, with this correction process itself becoming the mechanism that constrained entrepreneurial agency. As the UN official remarked: *"I remember there was this [official] document that everyone was talking about... the lessons learned from Zaatari"* [UN-UP]. While Zaatari underwent organic development owing to nominal management, the example of its sister camp, Azraq, embodied a case of corrective micromanagement that deliberately filled the institutional voids that had enabled agency in Zaatari.

Essentially, the notion of institutional correction stood in direct opposition to the enabling conditions observed in Zaatari. Where institutional voids in Zaatari created spaces for opportunity that shadow institutions spontaneously filled, Azraq's corrective approach actively nullified the potential for these 'economic spaces' to be actualised through deliberate institutional presence. The absence of formal market structures that had allowed Zaatari's entrepreneurs to establish autonomous commercial networks was replaced in Azraq by rigidly defined commercial frameworks. Similarly, the regulatory gaps that had permitted entrepreneurial experimentation in Zaatari were meticulously addressed through comprehensive control systems in Azraq. Most critically, the shadow institutions that had flourished in Zaatari's institutional voids, providing alternative financing, supply chains, and governance mechanisms, found no equivalent space to emerge in Azraq's densely regulated environment. This stark contrast illustrates how the same institutional dimensions that enabled agency through their absence in Zaatari became constraining through their deliberate implementation in Azraq.

Fundamentally, this remedial camp appeared to control autonomous refugee agency through two key mechanisms: the notion of population management thus serving to regulate refugee mobility, and through the control of resource distribution systems, resulting in more organised resource allocation thereby constraining economic activity. As the UN representative further remarked regarding the notion of institutional upgrade: *"there was a lot more structure [in the*

successive camp], not only in terms of infrastructure like physical infrastructure. But there was a lot more room for UNHCR to put structures in place" (UN-UP). Essentially the mechanisms of population management and resource distribution control ultimately serve as the second order theoretical concepts which underpin this dimension of correction that, by design, constrained refugee entrepreneurial agency.

5.2.1.1. Population Management

The subtheme of population management embodies a concerted effort to institutionally control the movement of refugees predominately through a policy of spatial allocation. In comparison to Zaatari's early anarchy, Azraq employed an array of authoritarian mechanisms aimed at tracking and regulating refugee mobility. This became apparent with their work permit process where refugees would regularly exit and re-enter the camp resulting in a mass exodus thereby directly impacting the camp's economy. These measures not only impacted individual agency but ultimately shaped the camp's social and economic dynamics. In sum, relevant first order concepts which support this theme relate to: a *managed exodus system*, *seasonal population dynamics* and the associated *impact on the camp economy*.

5.2.1.1.1. Managed Exodus System

Both camps operated under similar permit-based exodus systems, with refugees able to obtain work-related exit permissions as reported by one refugee entrepreneur: *"It's one month for every individual, and they return and renew it to leave the camp again"* [RE3-A]. However, the stark difference in geographical proximity to urban centres created divergent mobility realities. While Zaatari's location enabled daily commuting to and from the camp, *"Most people go on work leave in Zaatari and return to their homes at the end of the day"* [RE3-A], Azraq's isolation however forced longer periods between repatriations: *"It is not good because it is 25 kilometres away from the nearest city, and this is an obstacle for young people who want to work outside the camp and have to sleep outside the camp"* [RE17-A]. This disparity, combined with strict internal controls as exemplified by, *"Villages 2 and 5"* [CG], meant that identical institutional policies produced markedly different effects on refugee mobility between each camp and their respective economic zones. These contrasting mobility patterns subsequently influenced seasonal population fluctuations more pronouncedly in the case of Azraq owing to its geographic isolation which effectively limited and constrained its refugee agency.

5.2.1.1.2. Seasonal Population Dynamics

The camps exhibited contrasting patterns of seasonal population movement, shaped by their distinct spatial configurations. While both experienced summer outflows, their impacts differed markedly. In Azraq, extended separation periods due to its isolation led to prolonged absences as indicated by one refugee entrepreneur: *"During this period [summer], many people leave the camp for work or visits and to go to the city. The camp population becomes less than usual, and the situation remains like this for 3 months in the summer"* [RE20-A], with dramatic effects on camp vitality when *"we're left with close to 20% of the camp's population. The rest are on work leave"* [RE3-A]. These extended absences were particularly impactful given reduced aid levels in more recent times: *"Now the camp is going through very difficult circumstances because family aid is being reduced"* [RE18-A].

In contrast, Zaatari's proximity to built-up areas such as Mafraq, positioned it differently on the enabling-constraining spectrum regarding location factors. This geographic advantage enabled shorter separation periods, allowing refugees to maintain camp residency while pursuing external opportunities. This movement pattern, though still regulated through the work-permit system, created a multiplier effect where economic benefits from external work could be more readily repatriated into the camp's economy meaning Zaatari's entrepreneurs benefited from greater cashflow. Essentially these divergent patterns of population movement and economic repatriation illustrate how the same dimension (i.e. geographic location), can function at different points along the enabling-constraining spectrum, with profound implications for the commercial vitality of each camp's respective marketplace.

5.2.1.1.3. Impact on Camp Economies

The seasonal population fluctuations manifested distinctly different economic impacts across the two camps. In Azraq, summer departures severely disrupted commercial activity, with business owners noting significant declines: *"During this [summer] period, many residents went out to work and the demand for restaurants decreased... I did not find it profitable"* [RE19-A]. This economic stagnation was starkly visible in the camp's marketplace, which took on an almost desolate appearance as reported by the camp translator: *"Azraq was very quiet. I didn't feel there was life in the camp. It wasn't like a city. When you go to it, it's like the old movies - like an abandoned town. There's no movement in the marketplace"* [TL]. These

economic downturns appeared cyclical, with refugee entrepreneurs anticipating recovery only with population returns: *"Now is the summer vacation period, and I hope that the situation will improve after the children return to school and the families return home"* [RE16-A].



Figure 22: Village 3 marketplace in Azraq – a challenging summer

The impact was particularly pronounced in Azraq's segregated village system, where *"every village had their own market"* [CG], meaning reduced footfall invariably affected multiple marketplaces simultaneously. This seasonal dependency was further emphasised by another refugee entrepreneur noting *"When winter returns and schools return, normal movement will return to the camp"* [RE17-A]. In contrast to Zaatari, where the centralised market streets appeared to amplify commercial activity through greater connectivity and subsequent foot traffic, Azraq's prolonged population absences and fragmented marketplace structure created pronounced boom-bust cycles in its commercial zones as evidenced by the sheer number of empty retail units as observed in the research fieldnotes, *"I remember seeing a lot of the empty shops at Azraq"* [RF]. Figures 22 and 23 illustrate the stark contrast in vibrancy between camps.

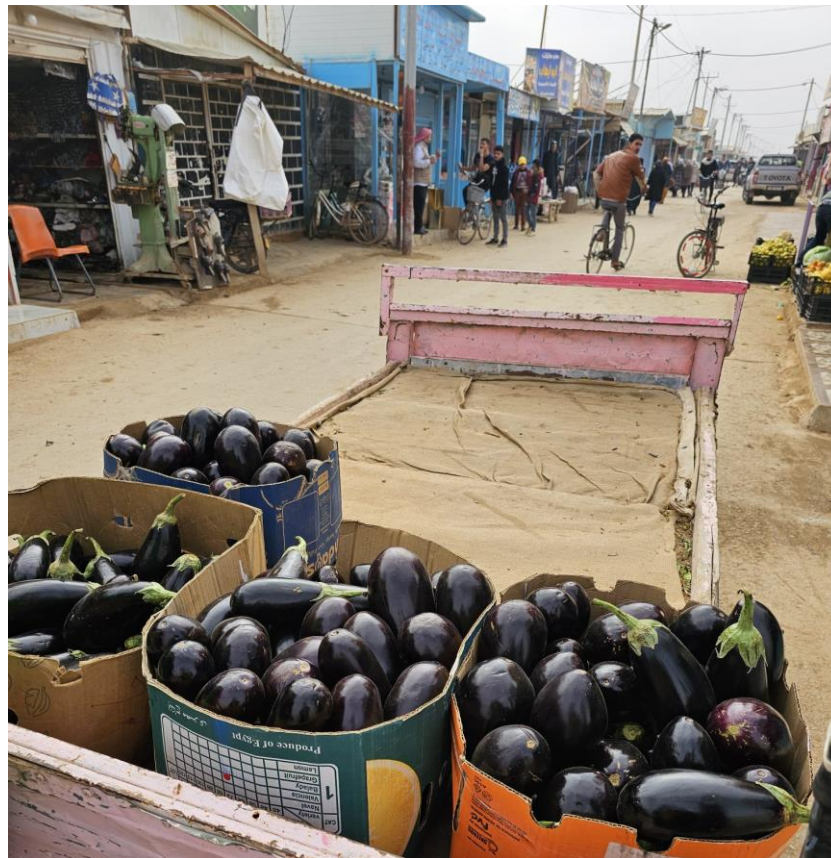


Figure 23: Market Street 1 (Zaatari) known colloquially as the Champs Elysees

5.2.1.2. Resource Distribution Management

The subdimension of resource distribution management signified a unique dual system of aid allocation and synchronised regulation that effectively limited the selection of resources made available to Azraq's inhabitants. While Azraq's inhabitants experienced the same electronic payment infrastructure as their Zaatari counterparts, the position of centralised amenities within the camp appeared to be a contrasting factor thereby shoehorning refugee choice. Thus, the Azraq model seemingly extended beyond mundane aid distribution to a bespoke network of controlled economic transactions through the medium of a centralised mall. The outcome was a marked departure from Zaatari's informal model whereby track and trace mechanisms were employed to confine economic agency. In essence, the first order concepts which support this subdimension were threefold: *centralised shopping infrastructures*, *supply chain regulations* and the impact of *humanitarian aid reductions*.

5.2.1.2.1. Centralised Shopping Infrastructures

Analysis revealed contrasting approaches to retail centralisation between the two camps. In Azraq, the establishment of a central mall represented an institutional attempt to funnel refugee shopping habits away from decentralised village markets, enabling greater oversight of commercial activity. In doing so, seemingly reduced market footfall in the decentralised markets where refugee entrepreneurs operated from, further using price offerings to divert refugee consumers further away from the village markets as reported by one frustrated refugee entrepreneur, *"The mall's prices are actually lower than market prices!"* [RE15-A]. Other refugee entrepreneurs found it hard to compete with as: *"The mall has everything from food to clothes and also cleaning products!"* [RE7-A].

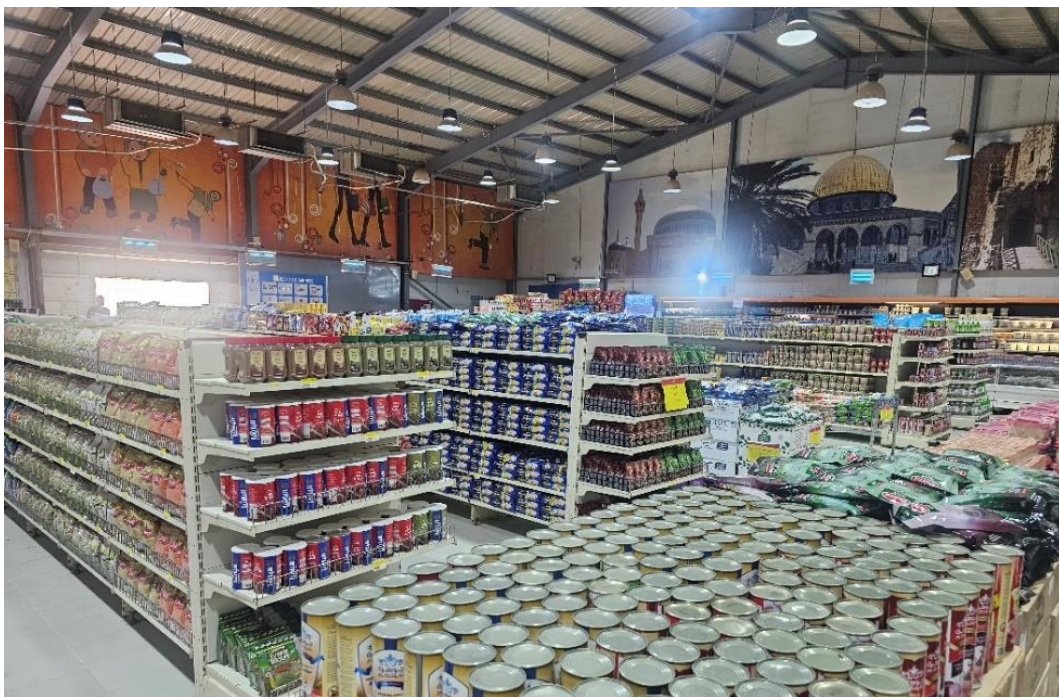


Figure 24: Centralised shopping facilities in Azraq

However, some refugee entrepreneurs appeared to capitalise on the mall's cashless operation, demonstrating agency by circumventing the formal retail system as the mall was unable to accept: *"cash, so the mall doesn't benefit, and everyone comes to buy here [using] cash."* [RE15-A]. RE15-A further differentiated his business by developing trade relationships with

other camp businesses thus diversifying away from the retail client space, further offering credit to commercial customers: *"Abu Muhammad and Jassim (restaurant owners), they take their goods and vegetables from me, and we help each other. They can take and pay later because they are known in the market and throughout the village"*. While these informant-based excerpts reflect some level of reactive agency from refugee vendors, on the whole, the presence of formal centralised amenities appeared to constrain the operations of most refugee businesses in Azraq made evident by its deserted within-village market spaces.

In the case of Zaatari, its centralisation emerged organically through the agency of refugee gangs, with its commercial hub developing along a bustling thoroughfare through collective agency rather than institutional design. This bottom-up formation reflected how divergent approaches to retail organisation - institutional (Azraq) versus refugee-led (Zaatari) - produced markedly different ecosystems within each camp. In essence, this contrast between institutionally-imposed and refugee-driven centralisation ultimately shaped how goods and services flowed into each camp, creating distinct supply chain dynamics that further differentiated their commercial environments.

5.2.1.2.2. Supply Chain Regulations

Supply chain configurations emerged differently across the two settlements. In Azraq, a highly regulated system controlled the flow of goods through formal channels: *"Through permits, we leave the camp and go to the area near us, such as Al-Wahdat or Zarqa, and bring goods"* [RE4-A]. This formalised process required merchants to follow specific protocols: *"I send him what I want and submit a [formal] request to him here to enter the camp"* [RE14-A], with regular scheduled deliveries maintaining stock levels: *"A transport vehicle comes to the camp every 3 days, and I buy from it"* [RE17-A]. This controlled supply chain reflected Azraq's broader institutional design, where geographical isolation and structured layout facilitated tighter regulation of commercial inputs.

In contrast, Zaatari's proximity to civilian areas and porous perimeter created conditions for more diverse supply routes. The camp's informal networks for example, facilitated by local Bedouin communities who provided *"informal taxi bus service inside the camp"* [ND-2], enabled alternative supply channels beyond institutional control. This less regulated environment allowed entrepreneurs to develop creative solutions for stock procurement, though sometimes through unauthorised means such as smuggling. Moreover, the daily

movement of workers returning from jobs outside the camp inadvertently created more opportunities for small-scale smuggling into Zaatari, whilst their counterparts in Azraq experienced greater return distances meaning daily repatriations were less feasible.

These contrasting approaches to supply chain regulation - institutional control versus entrepreneurial adaptation - fundamentally shaped how businesses in each camp sourced and maintained their inventory. These divergent supply chain configurations produced markedly different levels of economic resilience between the camps. This became particularly evident when humanitarian aid was reduced, as Zaatari's vibrant marketplace and diverse supply networks provided its inhabitants with an economic buffer, while Azraq's more constrained ecosystem left its residents more vulnerable to such institutional changes.

5.2.1.2.3. *Reductions in Humanitarian Aid*

The reduction in humanitarian aid created divergent impacts across the two camps, shaped by their distinct economic infrastructures. In Azraq, where institutional dependency was higher, aid cuts struck particularly hard: *"Support for visas has decreased, and other financial support from organizations to which residents are accustomed has decreased"* [RE11-A]. The scope of these reductions was significant, affecting basic allowances that had previously sustained families: *"About 50 dinars, and some people get 60, depending on how many people you have in the family"* [RE7-A]. This contraction in support forced difficult household decisions, as one refugee entrepreneur noted: *"Their priority right now is to feed their children before buying new clothes or new shoes"* [RE11-A]. The situation appeared increasingly precarious with looming threats of further cuts according to one refugee source: *"There is news that at the end of this year, credit cards may be completely cut off... In my opinion, I see that 90% of the camp's population is below the poverty line"* [RE10-A].

While these reductions affected both camps, Zaatari's vibrant marketplace and diverse informal economy provided its inhabitants with greater resilience. The camp's economic robustness was evidenced by its impressive *"employment rate of 65%"* [ND-2], creating a significant buffer against aid reductions through locally generated income and commercial activity. In contrast, Azraq's more constrained ecosystem, characterised by regulated markets and limited informal trade, left its residents particularly vulnerable to institutional changes. This was evident in the shift in purchasing patterns: *"Previously, people could buy school uniforms, bags, and toys or*

pens, for example, but now people save this money just to secure their food and drink" [RE18-A], highlighting how reduced aid had more severe implications in environments with fewer economic alternatives.

5.2.2. DESIGN STRUCTURES

The structural design of Azraq camp reflected a deliberate institutional response to Zaatari's autonomous development. Its physical layout and regulatory framework were specifically engineered to prevent the kind of independent refugee enterprise that had emerged organically in Zaatari. Zaatari's organic development seemingly facilitated refugee agency, prompting institutional powers to design Azraq as a deliberate counterpoint through two key mechanisms: a policy of spatial segregation, whereby the camp's population was intentionally fragmented through the introduction of decentralised village systems, and through market controls mechanisms, which aimed at regulating refugee economic activity through mandated partnerships with local Jordanians. Combined, these design foundations effectively 'immunised' against uncontrolled refugee agency by creating what the fieldwork translator actively described as *".. like an abandoned place. There are no cities around it"* (TL), referring to the Azraq camp. Invariably, the subdimensions of *spatial segregation* and *market control mechanisms* served as the underlying second-order themes of this aggregate theoretical dimension and are contextualised in the following paragraphs.

5.2.2.1. Spatial Segregation

The use of isolation at Azraq, appeared to be an intentional design strategy to limit refugee agency through physical architecture. Azraq was pre-planned, operating as a spillover for the Zaatari camp, as the UN official remarked: *"whereas Azraq...it was pre planned...And there was a lot more structure, not only in terms of infrastructure like physical infrastructure...[but] the house numbers and who lives where...And the market itself too"*. Essentially the policy of segregation could be seen on two-levels, the camp's actual isolation from nearby towns and cities (*"Azraq was in the middle of the desert"* - TL) and its internal layout consisting of isolated villages with controlled market spaces (*"the idea came about of doing decentralisation"* UN-UP). This spatial fragmentation occurred from the learnings of Zaatari, where the SRAD and UNHCR viewed Zaatari's centralised market as problematic: *"I remember there was this document that everyone was talking about, the lessons learned from [Zaatari]...one of the*

biggest issues people were talking about was that especially the government was that they felt... it was, too centralised, the way that the market was designed, the government found it too difficult for them in general to kind of manage and monitor." [UN-UP]. Furthermore, Zaatari's geographic location near the Syrian border further compounded matters owing to extant issues surrounding smuggling. The resultant policy not only separated external and internal inhabitants more profoundly in Azraq but also greatly modified how refugees could engage in entrepreneurship activities within this archetypical camp. In sum, this second-order theme exhibited the following first order concepts: *geographic isolation, inter-village blockades, and marketplace constraints*.

5.2.2.1.1. Geographic Isolation

Azraq's geographic isolation emerged as a deliberate institutional design choice that significantly constrained entrepreneurial possibilities, informed by Zaatari's unique development. Field observations confirmed the camp's stark separation from civilian areas: *"Azraq was in the middle of the desert. It's like an abandoned place. There are no cities around it"* [TL]. This physical isolation, with *"the nearest city to us is Zarqa, which is about 30 kilometres away"* [RE1-A], created logistical challenges that directly impeded entrepreneurial activity and limited business formation. The impact of this geographic separation manifested in multiple ways for entrepreneurship.

For existing entrepreneurs, it complicated supply chains and raised operational costs: *"It may affect in one respect, which is that the export locations are far away and you need to receive supplies from other and distant cities"* [RE14-A]. For aspiring refugee entrepreneurs seeking to build capital through external employment, the distance created particular hardships, as *"this is an obstacle for young people who want to work outside the camp and have to sleep outside the camp"* [RE17-A], limiting their ability to accumulate startup funds or develop business networks. Unlike Zaatari, where proximity to urban areas enabled daily commuting and facilitated informal trade networks crucial for entrepreneurial ventures, Azraq's deliberate placement *"25 kilometres away from the nearest city"* [RE17-A], effectively curtailed entrepreneurial opportunities through market isolation.

This geographic isolation thus served as a powerful institutional mechanism for restricting entrepreneurial innovation and growth, demonstrating how spatial planning could be deployed

to constrain the kind of autonomous business development that had characterised Zaatari's refugee-led entrepreneurial ecosystem. Moreover, geographic isolation was further reinforced through internal mobility restrictions between Azraq's four villages, creating additional barriers to customer acquisition, market expansion, and business partnerships within the camp itself, all critical elements for entrepreneurial success.

5.2.2.1.2. *Inter-village Blockades*

Azraq's segregated village system formed a second layer of spatial control beyond its geographic isolation. The camp's design deliberately fragmented its population across separate villages, with each having *"their own market"* [CG], creating distinct commercial zones rather than allowing organic centralisation. Physical barriers to inter-village movement were built into the camp's architecture, with *"very little shaded area in between the villages"* [UN-UP] and significant distances to traverse in harsh desert conditions, *"it's huge. And it's very hot"* [UN-UP].

This physical fragmentation was reinforced through explicit security protocols, most notably in the case of specific villages: *"Villages 2 and 5 we were not allowed to enter because they [refugees] don't have security checks"* [CG]. Unlike Zaatari's integrated layout, where a centralised marketplace facilitated community interaction and economic vitality, Azraq's village system effectively compartmentalised its population, restricting both social and commercial exchange between different sections of the camp. This intervillage blockade system represented another institutional mechanism for preventing the kind of autonomous commercial development that had characterised Zaatari, by physically separating potential markets and limiting freedom of movement within the camp itself. Satellite images derived from the UNHCR website (overleaf), provide a visual representation of the professionally designed village markets (Figure 25 - Azraq), compared with the refugee designed market streets (Figure 26 - Zaatari).

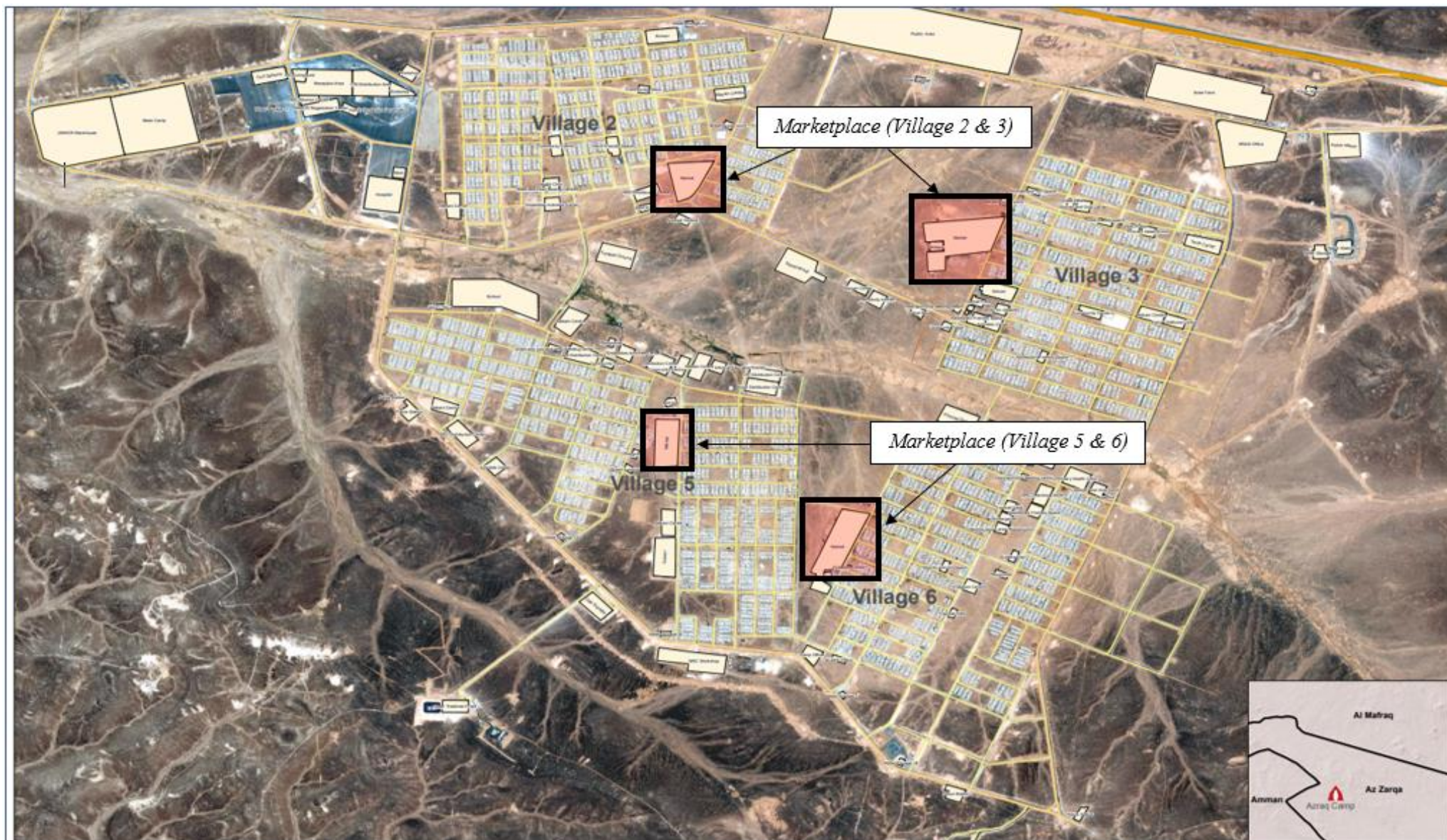


Figure 25: Satellite image of Azraq's village system (UNHCR 2020)

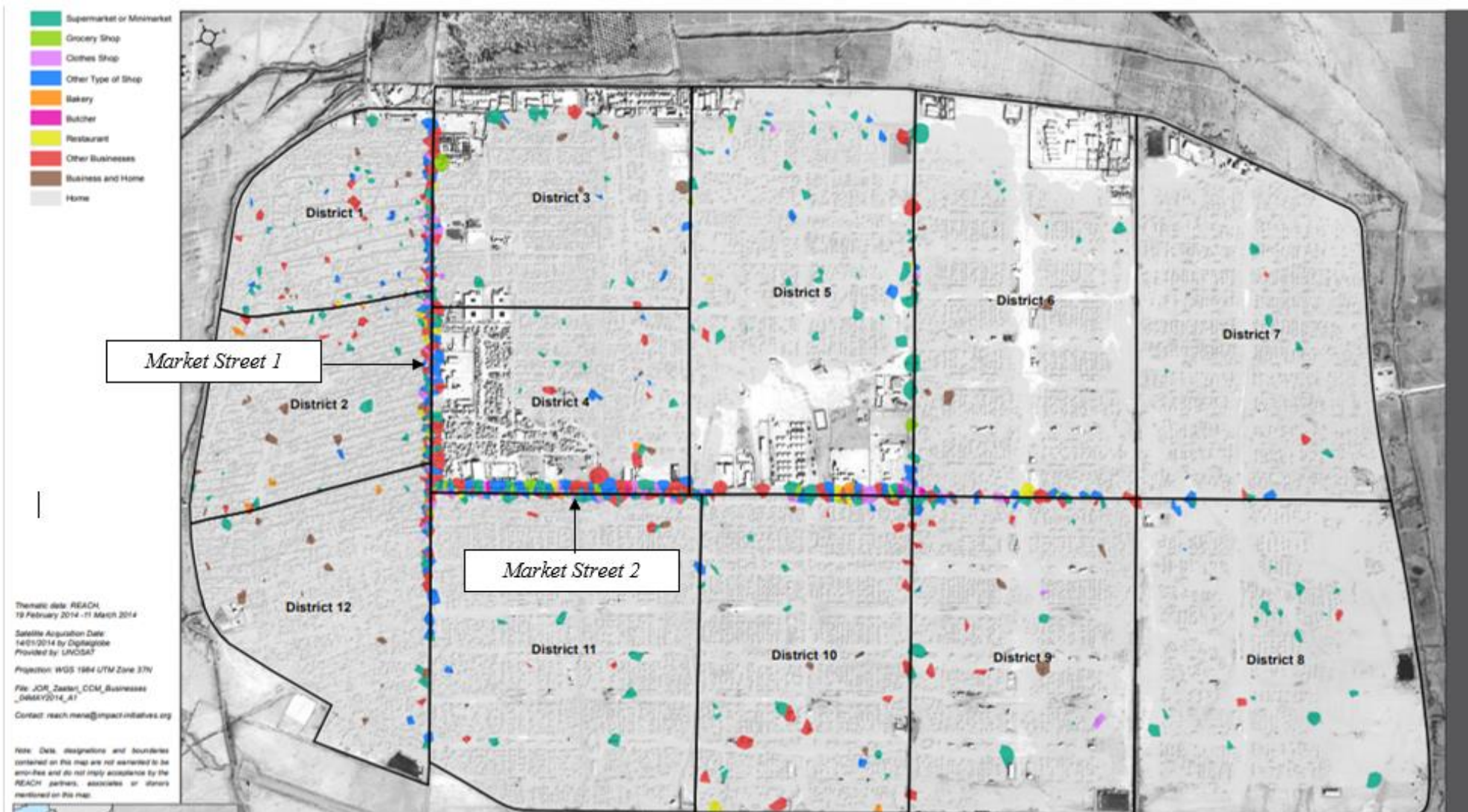


Figure 26: Satellite image of the Zaatari's market streets (UNHCR 2020)

5.2.2.1.3. Marketplace Constraints

The institutional regulation of commercial activity manifested differently across the two camps, creating distinct environments that shaped entrepreneurial possibilities through structural conditions. In Azraq, a rigid system of market control was implemented from the outset: *"there's a fixed marketplace"* [UN-UP]. This predetermined commercial infrastructure sharply constrained entrepreneurial options by limiting where, when, and how businesses could operate, in contrast to Zaatari's organic development, where refugees had shaped their own market spaces along the centralised "Champs Elysées" [RF].

The contextual constraints in Azraq operated through multiple mechanisms that directly impacted entrepreneurial opportunity structures. Initially, through delayed market implementation, as the UN representative noted that *"it took quite a while actually for the market spaces to open...maybe two years later"* [UN-UP], forcing refugees to rely solely on humanitarian aid during this period for provision. Once established, further structural barriers emerged through the limited allocation of commercial spaces: *"the camp gave out shops in 2016, and they are all gone by now"* [RE3-A], creating artificial scarcity of entrepreneurial opportunities as evidenced by the mere 375 registered businesses compared with over 1,800 businesses in Zaatari. Access was also tightly controlled: *"Azraq camp is closed [off] and the number of its visitors is restricted"* [RE14-A], severely limiting the potential customer base for entrepreneurial ventures. This was further compounded by the camp's enforced partnership model between Syrian and Jordanian traders, requiring businesses to be *"somehow co-owned by a Jordanian and a Syrian"* [UN-UP], a policy implemented *"to deal with these frustrations that some Jordanians were having"* [UN-UP], thus aimed at alleviating xenophobia towards refugees while simultaneously restricting refugees' entrepreneurial autonomy.

In contrast, Zaatari's marketplace evolved through refugee initiative and autonomy, where entrepreneurs could *"shape them [units] as they wanted. They would put them also in the place that they wanted"* [UN-UP]. This freedom in commercial space organisation invariably gave rise to the exponential start-up rate in Zaatari thus exhibiting a more dynamic and responsive business environment than the Azraq archetype, which embodied the actualisation of institutional constraints.

This was further compounded by the camp's enforced partnership model between Syrian and Jordanian traders, requiring businesses to be *"somehow co-owned by a Jordanian and a Syrian"* [UN-UP], a policy implemented *"to deal with these frustrations that some Jordanians were having"* [UN-UP], thus aimed at alleviating xenophobia towards refugees while simultaneously restricting refugees' entrepreneurial autonomy.

In contrast, Zaatari's marketplace context evolved with fewer structural barriers, where potential entrepreneurs could *"shape them [units] as they wanted. They would put them also in the place that they wanted"* [UN-UP]. This contextual freedom in commercial space organisation invariably created conditions for the exponential start-up rate in Zaatari, establishing a more conducive environment for entrepreneurial activity than the Azraq archetype, which embodied the actualisation of institutional constraints on entrepreneurial opportunity.

5.2.2.2. Market Control Mechanisms

The second-order theme of market control could be perceived as a deliberate response mechanism to Zaatari's uninhibited growth. While Zaatari's market appeared to be the net outcome of institutional voids and the subsequent rise of shadow structures, Azraq on the other hand appeared to adopt a contrarian approach to commercial operations. Essentially, the theme of market control mechanisms was manifested through mandated alliances with local Jordanians to mitigate against xenophobia, formal registration requirements, and designated market spaces. The outcome of these formations was a highly organised and structured context that considerably constrained refugee agency. In sum, relevant first order concepts which support this subdimension can be conceptualised as: *regulated business ownership, operational restraints and pricing and service control mechanisms*.

5.2.2.2.1. Regulated Business Ownership

The institutionally enforced co-ownership model in Azraq camp, while ostensibly designed to mitigate local tensions, effectively created a system of economic subordination. This policy emerged from perceived competition with local communities, as the UN representative noted: *"..that was part of trying to deal with these frustrations that some Jordanians were having, especially those around [the camp], I'm sure you hear this not just in Jordan, but 'ohh refugees*

are taking our jobs', but 'we're [the locals] are also struggling, but all the money is going to them [refugees]' [UN-UP]. The resulting mandate involved "Every kiosk and business that opens up has to be somehow co-owned by a Jordanian and a Syrian" [UN-UP], creating an uneven power dynamic within the camp's commercial sector. Rather than fostering true partnership, this often resulted in refugees becoming subordinate to Jordanian business interests: "The main owner of the shop is Jordanian, and for whom I work, he rents the shop from him and pays him the rent monthly" [RE4-A]. This system effectively transferred economic opportunity from refugees to local Jordanians, while simultaneously limiting refugees' access to independent business ownership, as evidenced by one refugee's experience: "I registered my name to have my own shop, but I was not lucky" [RE19-A].

In contrast to Zaatari's autonomous business environment, where refugees maintained full ownership and control of their enterprises, Azraq's co-ownership requirement represented another institutional mechanism for constraining refugee economic agency while ensuring external actors captured a portion of the camp's commercial benefits. This institutionalised co-ownership model therefore formed part of a broader framework of operational restrictions that further distinguished Azraq's regulated business environment from Zaatari's more autonomous commercial ecosystem.

5.2.2.2.2. Operational Restraints

The institutional control over business operations in Azraq manifested through a complex system of regulatory oversight, extending beyond mere ownership structures. From the camp's inception, institutional authorities prioritised strict commercial control: *"there was a lot of management level conversations happening about how are we going to manage in this [Azraq] market" [UN-UP]. This managerial approach contrasted sharply with Zaatari's organic development, where refugees had greater autonomy in shaping their business operations.*

The constraints manifested through both prohibitive and permissive mechanisms. Certain business activities permitted in Zaatari were explicitly banned in Azraq: *"It's not allowed to raise animals here [unlike Zaatari], such as donkeys, horses [for transportation rides]" [RE15-A]. Figure 27 illustrates the use of donkeys for transportation purposes (e.g. donkey-carriage service) in the Zaatari camp, yet this was outlawed in the more formal and modern Azraq camp. Access to business opportunities in Azraq was further tightly controlled through a registration*

system that created artificial scarcity: *"when the market opened in 2016... I registered my name to have my own shop, but I was not lucky"* [RE19-A]. This bureaucratic gatekeeping stood in stark contrast to Zaatari's entrepreneurial environment, where refugees could adapt residential units into commercial spaces and shape their business models according to market demands.



Figure 27: The permitted use of donkey-carts in Zaatari

Moreover, unlike Zaatari, where entrepreneurs could modify their business premises, Azraq's fixed marketplace structure imposed physical constraints on business adaptation and growth. These operational restrictions, combined with the aforesaid co-ownership model, created a highly regulated business environment that significantly limited refugee economic agency. In sum, these operational constraints formed part of a broader institutional framework that extended beyond business operations to regulate pricing structures and service delivery in Azraq, thereby creating another layer of control over refugee commerce.

5.2.2.2.3. Pricing and Service Control Mechanisms

The regulation of service delivery and pricing in Azraq reflected another dimension of institutional control, particularly through its centralised mall system. A complex dynamic emerged between formal and informal retail sectors, with the mall leveraging institutional support to maintain competitive pricing: *"The mall's prices are actually lower than market prices, and it's logical that it sells better than us"* [RE15-A].

Within the village markets themselves, traders developed informal price regulation mechanisms: *"The price is set between us [traders], and we are not trying to harm any of the merchants"* [RE20-A]. This self-regulation contrasted with Zaatari's more dynamic pricing environment, where a broader range of services, including informal transportation through the example of donkey-drawn carriages and other informal practices, emerged organically to meet community needs. The absence of such adaptive service provision in Azraq, combined with its structured pricing mechanisms, demonstrated how institutional control extended beyond mere business operations to shape the fundamental nature of commercial interactions within the camp. These pricing and service delivery constraints marked another key distinction between Azraq's institutionally managed economy and Zaatari's more market-responsive commercial ecosystem.

5.3. Chapter Summary

This chapter examined the institutional conditions shaping entrepreneurial activity across Zaatari and Azraq through systematic cross-case analysis, identifying two enabling and two constraining dimensions. In Zaatari, institutional voids created openings for entrepreneurial initiative by removing prohibitive formal requirements and enabling experimentation, while shadow institutions filled these voids through alternative financing, community-based dispute resolution, and self-organised supply chains. In Azraq, institutional correction, deliberately designed in response to Zaatari's perceived informality, implemented comprehensive oversight that eliminated the spaces where autonomous entrepreneurship had flourished, while design structures fragmented commercial activity through segregated spatial arrangements that prevented the integrated market networks characteristic of Zaatari. Together, these four dimensions illustrate how seemingly analogous institutional conditions produced divergent entrepreneurial outcomes depending on camp context. The following chapter examines the

complementary conduct analysis, focusing on the entrepreneurial actions, strategies, and outcomes that refugee entrepreneurs employed within these contextual conditions.

CHAPTER 6: CONDUCT ANALYSIS

6.0. Introduction

Having examined the contextual dimensions that shape the entrepreneurial environment in the previous chapter, this chapter turns to the frame of conduct analysis, which focuses on the actual entrepreneurial practices, strategies, and interactions that refugee entrepreneurs deploy within these contextual conditions. While context analysis illuminated the structural factors along an enabling-constraining spectrum, conduct analysis on the other hand reveals how social agents respond to, and act within these conditions along a parallel transformative-reproductive continuum.

At one end of the continuum, transformative actions involve the conduct that can challenge, alter, or transform existing structural configurations (Giddens, 1984; Stones, 2005). Essentially, these concern innovative responses that can potentially create new institutional patterns and possibilities within a given context. At the opposite end, reproductive actions involve conduct that largely conforms to, reinforces, or maintains existing structural arrangements (Kennedy et al., 2021). Thus, rather than changing the said structures, reproductive actions effectively maintain the status quo.

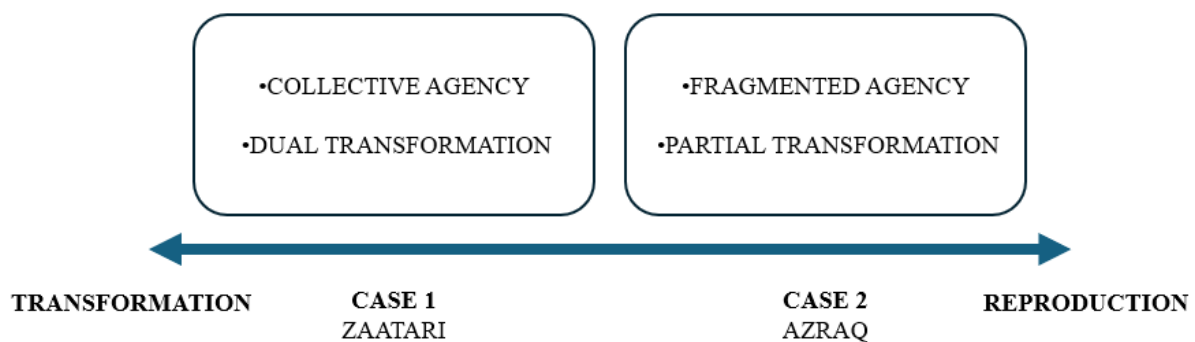


Figure 28: Transformative-Reproductive spectrum: Conduct Analysis

The study's case-related themes for the frame of conduct analysis can be seen in the above illustration (Figure 28), thus demonstrating comparisons across the theoretical sample. Cross-case analysis in this conduct dimension illustrates how refugee entrepreneurs in analogous

contextual environments can exhibit varying forms of entrepreneurial agency, from transformative actions that appear to alter existing social and internal structures exemplified through Case 1 to predominantly reproductive actions that effectively reinforces them in the example of Case 2. Thus, this transformative-reproductive spectrum provides insight into how entrepreneurial agency operates in response to the enabling-constraining contextual spectrum established in the preceding chapter. In the subsequent sections, the aggregate themes associated with the transformative dimension are discussed, the notion of Collective Agency and the resultant Dual Transformation from this collective output, thereby representing themes commonly associated with Case 1. Next, the aggregate themes relating to the reproductive dimension are discussed, namely the conceptions of Fragmented Agency leading to only Partial Transformation, thus exemplifying themes associated with Case 2.

6.1. TRANSFORMATIVE THEMES

The transformative themes within this dimension characterise the entrepreneurial actions and approaches through which refugee camp entrepreneurs actively reshaped their institutional landscape despite the associated constraints with encampment. In the case of Zaatari (Case 1) specifically, these themes manifest primarily through the aggregate dimensions of Collective Agency, where Zaatari's refugees were found to leverage their social capital through re-embedding homogeneity and associated social networks into the camp to amplify their transformative capacity; and Dual Transformation, where entrepreneurial actions were found to alter both social (external) and human (internal) structures manifesting through a prevailing entrepreneurial pivot coupled with the conversion of nostalgic sentiments into entrepreneurial action. Together, these elements constitute the transformative forces through which refugee entrepreneurs in Zaatari were found to transform their institutional landscape, rather than being overwhelmed by the said structures. Corresponding to context analysis, this transformative capacity exists along an analogous spectrum, meaning entrepreneurial actions range from fundamentally restructuring existing structures to making incremental modifications to those structures. Importantly, these transformative practices emerged in response to the enabling conditions identified in the context analysis, illustrating the alchemy between structural opportunities and entrepreneurial agency. Figure 29 provides the outline coding structure for this transformative dimension thereby highlighting the relevant aggregate themes, second order and first order thematic underpinnings (Gioia, 2021).

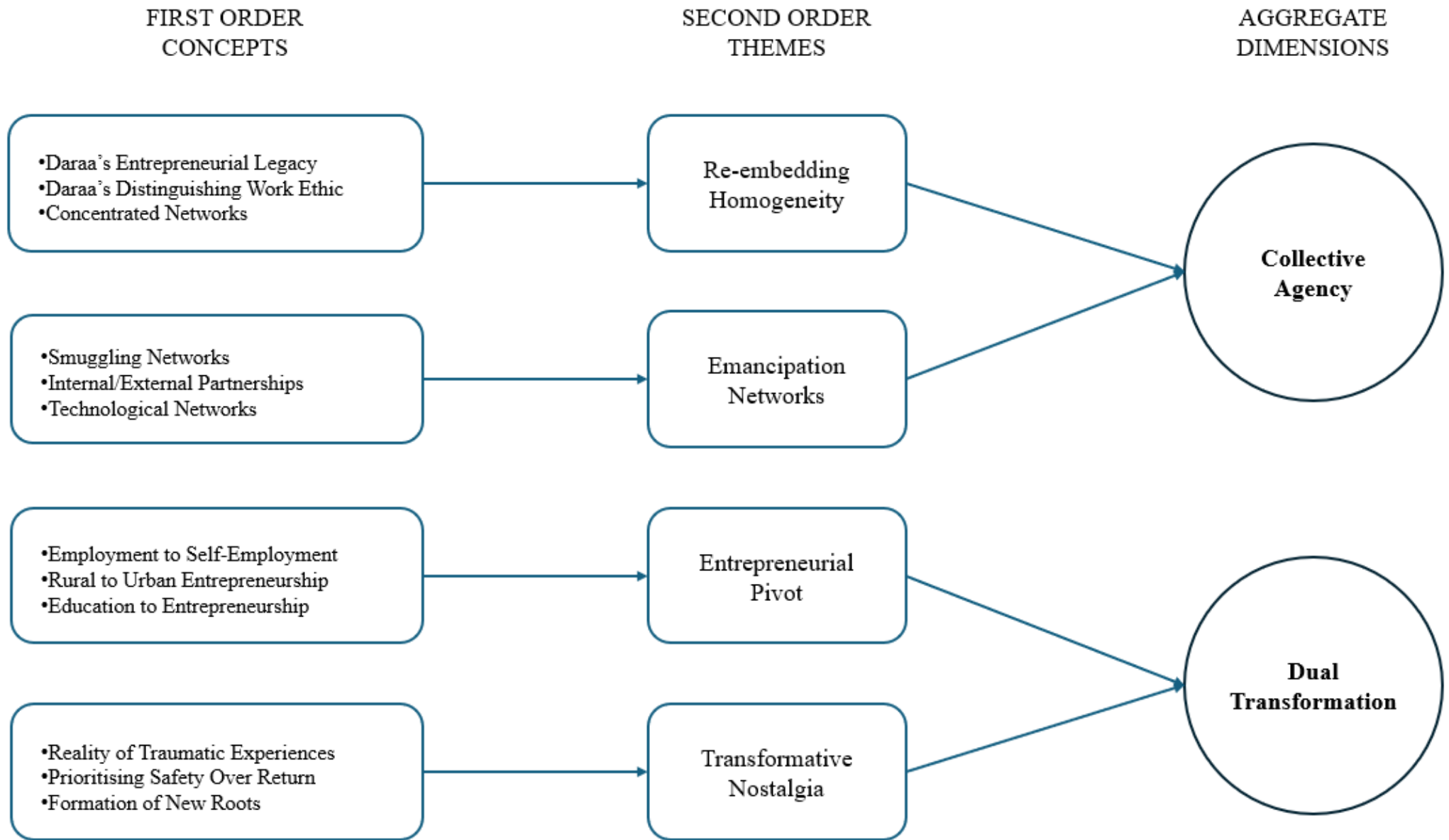


Figure 29: Transformative themes within the frame of Conduct Analysis

The following sections deconstruct both *Collective Agency* and *Dual Transformation* to accentuate their underlying mechanisms and how they function as transformative forces within Zaatari's entrepreneurial ecosystem.

6.1.1. COLLECTIVE AGENCY

The theoretical dimension of collective agency describes how refugees originating predominately from the Daraa province in Syria were able to effectively coordinate and collaborate in transplanting their entrepreneurial predispositions within a refugee camp setting. Rather than acting as isolated individuals, these refugees developed shared economic strategies, pooled resources, and collectively converted entrepreneurial spaces. While entrepreneurial potential is typically suppressed in many refugee settlements globally, the case of a homogeneous populace with inherent entrepreneurial predispositions coupled with expedient networking capabilities appeared to enable refugee entrepreneurs to re-embed their penchant for entrepreneurship. This collective action manifested through coordinated business activities, shared supply chains, and collaborative problem-solving that benefited the broader refugee community. Fundamentally this phenomenon can be conceptualised through two key mechanisms: *re-embedding homogeneity*, exhibiting how shared regional origins facilitated through communal decision-making and resource allocation, and *emancipatory networks*, where pre-existing informal networks were rewired to facilitate camp trade through coordinated rather than competitive approaches.

6.1.1.1. Re-embedding Homogeneity

The theme of re-embedding homogeneity essentially describes how the social and entrepreneurial characteristics of Daraa's community were effectively 'transplanted' over to the Zaatari camp. When the Syrian civil war displaced residents from Daraa, their distinctive entrepreneurial capabilities and social networks were first uprooted from their original context (dis-embedded) and then reconstructed (re-embedded) within the camp environment. Because such a large proportion of Zaatari's population came from Daraa, this transfer or transplantation of community characteristics and business practices recreated aspects of Daraa's entrepreneurial spirit within the camp. The municipality of Daraa in Syria is situated 13 kilometres north of the Syrian-Jordanian border and constitutes approximately 80% of the camp's inhabitants according to UNHCR data. However raw data derived from Table 9 (page

123) illustrates that 96% of Zaatari's entrepreneurs originated from the Daraa region, further reinforcing this notion of homogeneity. Consequently, this dense concentration of refugees accompanied with a penchant for entrepreneurship: "*...we are merchants and are well-known in trade and export... I am accustomed to being my own boss, and this is how we were raised in Daraa*" (RE5-Z), seemingly facilitated the transfer of pre-existing business practices and networks into a synthetic context. Essentially, this second-order theme establishes how cultural bonds and practices stemming from a transnational diaspora appeared to shape the notion of institutional entrepreneurship in the Zaatari camp. In sum, this theme is underpinned by the following first order concepts: *Daraa's legacy for entrepreneurship*, *Daraa's distinguishing work ethic*, and its associated *concentrated networks*.

6.1.1.1.1. Daraa's Legacy with Entrepreneurship

The distinctive entrepreneurial character of Zaatari can be traced to the shared cultural heritage of its predominantly Daraa-originated population. This entrepreneurial legacy manifested through deeply ingrained cultural values that appeared to prioritise business ownership over employment: "*We do not prefer to work for people, and most of us own businesses such as restaurants and groceries*" [RE1-Z]. The practice of entrepreneurship was not merely an economic choice but a cultural imperative, as one refugee explained: "*We, the people of Daraa, are accustomed to having our own business. Even if you have a job, you have to have a shop to open after your work*" [RE17-Z].

This entrepreneurial disposition stemmed from Daraa's distinctive socio-economic environment. The region was characterised by a rich blend of agricultural and commercial traditions: "*Daraa's people are farmers and merchants, and there are not many people who study and were raised to work and trade, even the municipalities of Daraa are all agricultural land or industrial areas*" [RE8-Z]. The emphasis on self-employment and business ownership appeared deeply embedded in their upbringing: "*Because we are merchants and are well-known in trade and export... I am accustomed to being my own boss, and I do not like to be governed by anyone, and this is how we were raised in Daraa*" [RE5-Z]. Beyond commerce, Daraa's legacy included a broader culture of achievement and professional excellence: "*Daraa has a high culture, and it's known for its teachers, doctors, and engineers that you can find throughout the Arab world due to their abundance*" [RE17-Z]. This combination of entrepreneurial spirit and professional ambition distinguished Daraa's inhabitants: "*The reason*

is that the son of Daraa works, collects money, and uses it, and unlike the rest of the regions, we like to have our own work" [RE1-Z]. This legacy for entrepreneurial proclivity manifested not just in business ownership preferences, but in a distinctive approach to work itself, setting Daraa's refugees apart from their Syrian counterparts.



Figure 30: RE8-Z describing the self-sufficient nature of Daraa's populace

6.1.1.1.2. Daraa's Distinguishing Work Ethic

The entrepreneurial culture of Daraa's refugees manifested through a distinctive work ethic that emphasised not just business ownership, but aspirational achievement. Their approach to work reflected deeply held cultural values about success and self-determination: *"We, the son of Daraa works, collects money, and uses it... we like our homes to be like villas, unlike the rest of the governorates" [RE1-Z].* This ambition for material advancement through entrepreneurial effort distinguished them from other refugee populations. Thus, the relationship between work and autonomy emerged as a defining characteristic of their business approach: *"Because we are merchants and are well-known in trade and export... I am accustomed to being my own boss" [RE5-Z].*



Figure 31: RE5-Z statement "I am accustomed to being my own boss"

In sum, this distinctive work ethic, when transplanted to Zaatari, helped shape the camp's vibrant commercial environment. While Azraq's more regulated structure coupled with its heterogenous populace seemingly constrained such cultural expressions, Zaatari's more permissive environment allowed Daraa's entrepreneurial work ethic to flourish, contributing to the camp's remarkable economic development. Fundamentally, these unique features were ostensibly amplified through pre-existing social networks from Daraa, which were effectively transplanted into the camp environment, creating powerful channels for business collaboration and mutual support.

6.1.1.1.3. Concentrated Networks

The re-embedding of Daraa's community into Zaatari seemingly created an able network effect that amplified entrepreneurial activity through pre-existing social bonds. The concentration of business owners from the same region created natural clusters of commercial activity: *"Most of the store owners are from Daraa... Unlike the rest of the governorates... Sometimes you enter a small village and find ten restaurants"* [RE1-Z]. The geographic concentration of Daraa's community in Zaatari created an unexpected advantage, as pre-existing familial connections

naturally shaped business relationships, *"There is none [competition], because we are all cousins in this field of work and we are all from the same village"* [RE9-Z]. While not planned, this concentration of extended family networks from the same region created a fortuitous environment where trust and cooperation, rather than competition, became the foundation of business interactions. Furthermore, family ties played a crucial role in business knowledge transfer and support. As one refugee explained: *"I learned this work from my uncles in the camp because they were clothing merchants in Syria"* [RE13-Z]. These kinship networks facilitated not just skill sharing but also business development.

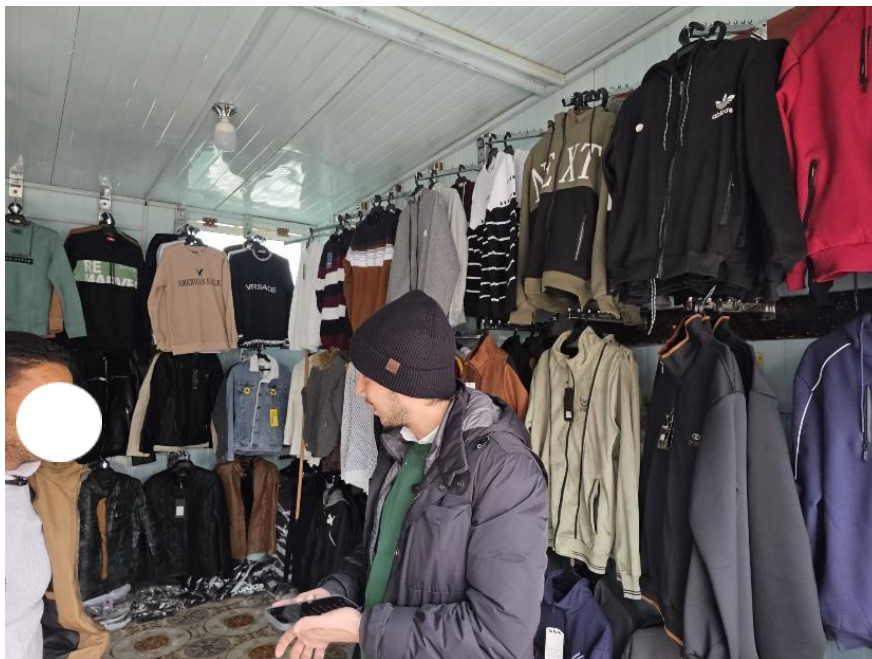


Figure 32: RE13-Z describing the influence of his uncle on his camp business

Fundamentally, the economic advantages of these dense networks extended to early business establishment in the camp: *"Also, at the beginning of the war, the people of Daraa were the ones who had money or capital, even if it was small, and they were the ones who were able to open shops"* [RE2-Z]. This initial advantage, combined with strong family ties, ostensibly created a self-reinforcing ecosystem of entrepreneurial activity that distinguished Zaatari's commercial development from Azraq's more fragmented and constrained environment.

6.1.1.2. Emancipatory Networks

The subdimension of emancipatory networks builds upon the entrepreneurial conduct patterns established in the previous chapter, demonstrating how these behaviours coalesce into complex, yet informal networks that enable entrepreneurial agency to thrive. While the context chapter examined entrepreneurial behaviours more broadly at both individual and collective levels, this section narrows in on the network-specific manifestations of entrepreneurial conduct. Essentially propped up by Zaatari's shadow institutions, these astute networks effectively developed intricate systems that extended beyond the camp confines, as exemplified by the e-card loophole. Through porous borders and juvenile operatives, these networks ultimately formed informal supply chains that appeared to evade formal camp restrictions while simultaneously empowering refugees to challenge and circumvent institutional control mechanisms. Essentially, the sophistication of these operations coupled with the enabling nature of institutional voids and shadow structures appeared to further enable the emergence of these informal systems that effectively transformed institutional entrepreneurship. This represents the collective amplification of the individual agency documented in the context chapter, where seemingly individualistic acts of bricolage, entrepreneurship and resistance amalgamate into organised networks with greater impact and reach.

Accordingly, relevant first order concepts which support this subdimension include the following: *smuggling operations*, *internal and external partnership relations*, and *technological based networks*, all of which demonstrate how the entrepreneurial behaviours documented in the previous chapter scale into more complex and impactful collective action.

6.1.1.2.1. Smuggling Networks

The emancipatory networks within Zaatari manifested most notably through sophisticated smuggling operations that challenged institutional control over resources and trade. These networks operated at multiple levels, from individual entrepreneurs circumventing regulations to organised groups conducting systematic contraband operations. A particularly sophisticated manifestation of these networks emerged through the e-card loophole, where refugees developed an intricate system to convert institutional aid into cash: *"Families buy a large bag of powdered milk for 9 dinars on their e-card and sell it immediately to a smuggler for seven dinars in cash. The smuggler then slips out of the camp past the SRAD Guards and resells the*

milk for 8 dinars to Jordanians" [ND-2]. This operation demonstrated how smuggling networks effectively redistributed resources while challenging institutional control over refugee finances.

Furthermore, these networks also extended to illegal utility access, with some refugees tapping into the camp's infrastructure as reported by the former camp manager: *"The air-conditioner runs with electricity he is tapping from the Italian hospital. The water for his tea is from canisters provided by UNICEF. He hasn't worked, paid or thanked anyone for any of it"* [ND-1]. In some areas, these networks evolved into more organised structures of control, as noted by the UN representative: *"..dynamic like mafia [gangs]...in certain areas of the camp [marketplace] are controlled by certain people"* [UN-UP].

In sum, these organised networks, while sometimes displaying coercive characteristics, ultimately represented refugees' collective resistance to institutional constraints on their economic agency. Essentially, while these smuggling networks operated largely through informal channels, they coexisted with more formalised partnership arrangements both within and beyond the camp boundaries, creating a myriad of economic relationships.

6.1.1.2.2. Internal & External Partnerships

The economic networks in Zaatari developed through a combination of both internal and external partnerships that facilitated business operations. A crucial element was the establishment of reliable supply chains with external distributors: *"As for the goods, there is a distributor in the camp itself, and he brings materials and food of all kinds and brings them from Amman"* [RE1-Z]. These external connections were maintained through regular resupply arrangements: *"My uncles bring them from Ramtha or Amman, and I take clothes from them. They come every 15 to 30 days"* [RE13-Z].

Within the camp, business partnerships evolved through both formal arrangements and familial ties. Some entrepreneurs developed collaborative relationships to enhance their operational capabilities: *"We have a partner in the second store, and he goes in his car to the central vegetable market"* [RE5-Z]. These partnerships extended into supply chain relationships between businesses: *"Yes, any store, from a butcher shop to a restaurant, we supply to them, deal with them"* [RE5-Z].

Significantly, family connections often superseded typical business competition: *"there is none [competition], because we are all cousins in this field of work"* [RE9-Z]. This interweaving of familial and business relationships created a cooperative rather than competitive commercial environment, distinguishing Zaatari's business ecosystem from typical market dynamics and from Azraq's more institutionally regulated partnerships. While these traditional partnership networks formed the foundation of business operations, entrepreneurs in Zaatari also leveraged digital technologies and social media platforms to extend their commercial reach beyond physical boundaries.

6.1.1.2.3. Technological Networks

The entrepreneurial ecosystem in Zaatari evolved beyond physical partnerships to embrace digital platforms as tools for business expansion and customer engagement. Social media emerged as a key marketing channel, with business owners leveraging Facebook to showcase their offerings: *"I also have a page on Facebook where I publish my work"* [RE8-Z]. This digital presence allowed entrepreneurs to display their full range of products and pricing information to a wider audience: *"Yes, I use Facebook and display my work, products, and prices"* [RE9-Z].

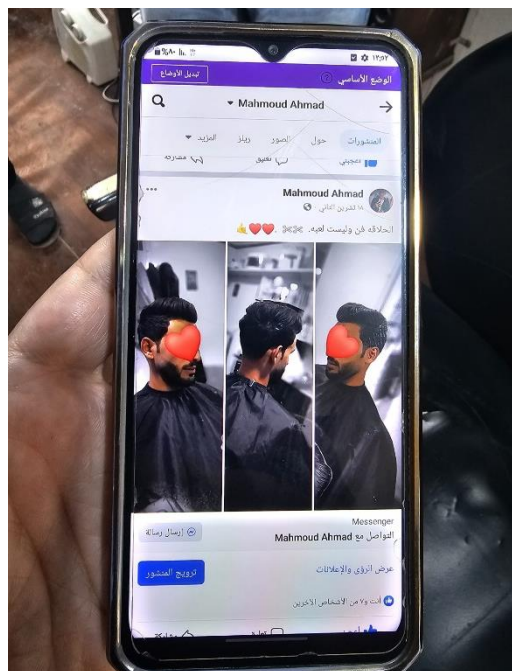


Figure 33: RE8-Z demonstrating the use of social media to market his barbershop services to camp residents

Moreover, the use of technology facilitated enhanced customer service through digital communication platforms. The integration of WhatsApp into business operations enabled entrepreneurs to offer additional services: *"We also deliver for free and take orders via WhatsApp"* [RE17-Z]. While entrepreneurs in both camps utilised these digital platforms, Azraq's fragmented village system and extensive unshaded distances between markets created significant logistical challenges for delivery services, limiting the practical benefits of digital ordering systems. This technological adaptation thus manifested differently across the two camps - while both embraced digital marketing, Zaatari's concentrated layout enabled more effective implementation of technology-enabled services compared to Azraq's dispersed village system.

6.1.2. DUAL TRANSFORMATION

The dimension of dual transformation illustrates how alternations in the refugees' individual identities (internal) led to structural changes within the institutional environment (external). Unlike harsh settlements where adaptation typically remains confined to the internal or individual-level, refugees at Zaatari embodied how internal transformations such as occupational shifts combined with malleable external structures appeared to enable the reshaping of the Zaatari camp. This singularity can be evidenced in how refugees not only adapted their professional identities but physically transformed the camp's marketplace as exemplified through *"An array of shops, what has been nicknamed the Champs-Élysées, which has mushroomed into effectively Jordan's fourth largest city"* [ND-4]. Fundamentally, this extensive transformation altered both the refugees themselves and their institutional context, ultimately leading to the notion of institutional correction in the subsequent camp. Essentially, this transformative dimension can be attributed to two key subdimensions: the concept of entrepreneurial pivots, whereby refugees readapted to camp life through entrepreneurial agency, and the notion of transformative nostalgia, a phenomenon whereby memories became a source of fuel for adaptive change and entrepreneurial action, corresponding to a concerted re-embeddedness taking place within the Zaatari camp. In sum the mechanisms of *entrepreneurial pivots* and *transformative nostalgia* customarily serve as the underpinning second-order concepts for this theoretical dimension and are expanded upon in the following paragraph sections.

6.1.2.1. Entrepreneurial Pivots

This subdimension refers to the strategic occupational adaptations refugees enacted in response to the constraints and opportunities presented by camp life. Raw data obtained from Zaatari's interviews illustrated a significant transformation pattern: over 80% of refugee entrepreneurs demonstrated an entrepreneurial career pivot at Zaatari (Methods Chapter, Table 9, page 123), transitioning to entirely different entrepreneurial occupations from their pre-war livelihoods. However, these pivots represent a complex spectrum ranging from basic survival tactics to proactive opportunity exploitation, constituting a nuanced interplay between pre-existing entrepreneurial dispositions and the institutional constraints of the camp environment. Essentially, this pivot process manifested through dual mechanisms: internal adaptation (wherein refugees reconfigured their skillsets and knowledge) and external transformation (wherein these adaptations collectively reshaped the camp's economic infrastructure). As refugee entrepreneurs adapted their professions to acclimatise to camp life, this aggregate behaviour led to the formation of new market spaces and business models paved by the emergence of Zaatari's shadow institutions. Fundamentally, these pivots demonstrate how entrepreneurial agency can reconfigure itself within highly CICs.

The empirical data accentuates three distinct pivot trajectories that comprise this subdimension: transitions from conventional employment-to-self-employment - where formerly employed individuals developed entrepreneurial ventures, instances from rural-to-urban entrepreneurship - where sector-specific skills were reimagined for camp-based enterprises, and cases from education-to-entrepreneurship - where those with academic backgrounds, while initially discontinuing education due to pressing survival needs, demonstrated entrepreneurial agency to forge new economic pathways).

6.1.2.1.1. *Employment to Self-Employment*

The shift from conventional employment to entrepreneurship in Zaatari emerged as a response to both practical constraints and personal aspirations. Initial attempts at formal employment within aid organisations proved problematic for some refugees: *"I tried employment before in the Norway organization, but I was fired after the first day on the pretext that my children got sick a lot"* [RE7-Z]. Such experiences with institutional employers highlighted the challenges refugees faced in balancing family responsibilities with traditional employment structures.

For some refugees, the switch from traditional employment to entrepreneurship was driven by physical ailments that rendered conventional employment means untenable. As one refugee entrepreneur explained: *"I went out to work in a towel factory for about two years, but I hurt my back and needed to leave that job. I came back to the camp and opened a clothing store"* [RE16-Z]. Thus, in this instance, a physical injury ultimately led to an entrepreneurial pivot further highlighting the vulnerabilities readily experienced by refugees engaged in physical labour, often without adequate occupational and health & safety protections. In relation, age-related considerations also predisposed employment-to-entrepreneurship shifts, as older refugees found general employment unsustainable: *"I tried to work on farms, but I am old and the work is very hard, and the payment was also low"* [RE18-Z]. Thus, for refugees with limited physical capacity, entrepreneurship became a tenable solution.



Figure 34: Shop belonging to RE16-Z 'I see a job as enslavement because it won't enrich you'

The transition to self-employment was also driven by both economic and dignity-preserving motivations. Refugees found greater financial autonomy through business ownership:

"Initially, I was uncomfortable working for others and wasn't getting a good salary. Here, I'm my own boss and don't have a manager" [RE13-Z]. The desire for independence emerged consistently across the interview data, with refugee entrepreneurs clearly contrasting entrepreneurial autonomy with perceived employment subordination: "Private work, of course, because I'm my own boss and there's no one controlling me. I see a job as enslavement because it won't enrich you and you'll remain in fear of being fired" [RE16-Z].

Beyond financial considerations, entrepreneurship allowed refugees, particularly older individuals, to maintain cultural dignity and family status: *"I don't want to work for anyone because I can't bear a young man telling me what to do while I'm an older man taking care of 14 people" [RE14-Z].* These aspects of dignity preservation exhibited both personal and cultural values surrounding autonomy and status, particularly pertinent for refugees who had previously experienced independent livelihoods prior to displacement.

Many of these entrepreneurial pivots often followed patterns of resource accumulation and business development. Some refugee entrepreneurs described initial small-scale enterprises that grew as capital increased: *"I found this shop for rent, so I took it as is and bought the goods little by little, and I now have this good business" [RE18-Z].* Others explained similar trajectories: *"I used to work on a cart selling food for dinner, and after I collected good money, I opened this shop" [RE7-Z].* In sum, these incremental journeys exhibited both the capital constraints refugees readily encountered and their ability to discover points of entry to operating their own businesses. Thus, rather than needing substantial capital, these progressive steps enabled many refugees to pivot from employment to entrepreneurship through employing patience and reasonable business expectations.

Moreover, some entrepreneurial pivots were often accompanied by risk management strategies, including consecutive pivots in response to market trends: *"I came back to the camp and opened a clothing store with my friend, gaining experience on how to talk to customers. We stayed open for 6 months. After that, we weren't profitable and closed it. Then I opened this store for cleaning materials" [RE16-Z].* Thus, this disposition to pivot between business ventures while encamped, rather than enduring unviable ventures, illustrates the conjunctural processes that ultimately led to effective employment-to-entrepreneurship transitions. Further examples of conjunctural-specific risk mitigation strategies based on the reality of camp living included the following statement: *"Due to my lack of experience in any field of work, I found*

it [shoe selling] easy and did not require this much effort and small capital" [RE18-Z]. Essentially, such conscious decision making to opt for lower-barrier ventures appeared to enable employment-to-entrepreneurship shifts in spite of limited experience, skills or capital.



Figure 35: Shop front belonging to RE18-Z – a former soldier turned shoe seller

For RE18-Z in particular, the transition from army soldier to civilian entrepreneur embodied not just an adjustment to encampment but a response to substantial loss owing to displacement: *"Here you have to work no matter how old you are. You have to work to bring in money. But in Syria, I had agricultural land, and I had more than one place to bring in money, not just from work"* [RE18-Z]. This therefore suggests that entrepreneurship served not merely as a means to obtain an income but as an attempt to rebuild economic security following displacement. RE18-Z further alluded to the psychological element of this form of compensatory entrepreneurship, where contrasts with their former asset rich way of life to the current predicament of camp living: *"This is what affected me the most because I am too old to be working all alone"* [RE18-Z], thus suggesting that employment-to-entrepreneurship transitions attempted to not only re-establish income streams, but also maintain economic autonomy previously derived from property ownership.

In summary, this theme of employment to self-employment contrasted sharply with Azraq's more constrained and regulated environment, where the institutional co-ownership model limited opportunities for autonomous RE. While Zaatari's refugees could transition from institutional dependency to self-employment more freely, Azraq's regulatory framework often maintained refugees in subordinate positions, even within their own enterprises. As one Zaatari entrepreneur observed when comparing camp marketplaces: *"I think the market here (Zaatari) is better because it is located in the middle of the camp and is a one-stop destination for everyone"* [RE18-Z], accentuating how structural differences between camps influenced entrepreneurial outcomes.

6.1.2.1.2. Rural-to-Urban Entrepreneurship

The pivot from rural and industrial livelihoods to urban entrepreneurship in Zaatari exposed characteristic patterns of spatial and economic adaptation amongst its refugee camp entrepreneurs. This change concerned not just occupational shifts but a fundamental pivot from production-based rural economies to exchange-based urban enterprise. Thus, many of Zaatari's refugees had deep connections to agricultural land prior to displacement that had provided not just livelihoods but generational identity: *"I was a farmer in Syria, and I had land that I cultivated and ate from... I opened this bakery in the year 2013 because there were no opportunities to work in agriculture"* [RE9-Z]. Another refugee entrepreneur reported: *"I was a farmer and a landowner in Syria. I used to cultivate the land and sell what was on it, and it was my full income"* [RE4-Z].

Interestingly, many refugees from agricultural backgrounds viewed their entrepreneurial pursuits as merely temporary rather than an enduring identity transformation: *"I see this job as only a temporary job here until I return to Syria, and I want to return, but the conditions there are unsafe and there is no stability"* [RE22-Z]. Another refugee described displacement as an occupational disruptor: *"I would not have opened a shop or my own business if I had stayed in Syria, because I own my land and my farm and I am sufficient for it, but the situation here made us think about trade and making money"* [RE9-Z]. Thus, these temporal framings of urban entrepreneurship as being provisional rather than permanent illustrate the deep attachment to agricultural identities in spite of displacement.



Figure 36: RE9-Z lamenting the lack of agriculture opportunities in Zaatari, resulting in him opening a bakery

Evidently, the impact of these rural-to-urban transitions were psychologically profound for many, as agricultural identity appeared to be intertwined with self-worth and security for many refugees: *"Of course, I was affected because I lost my home, my farm, and all my possessions in the war, but here I gained the security of myself and my family"* [RE4-Z]. Similarly, another refugee entrepreneur described: *"We fled out of fear for our families and daughters from the unjust regime, and we lost everything there, and there are people who suffered from mental illness, heart disease, and diabetes because of their anger at leaving their homeland"* [RE5-Z]. Thus, the emotional trauma of displacement formed the conjunctural frame against which many camp ventures were initiated.

These entrepreneurial pivots further reflected the regional characteristics that persisted even as economic activities transformed: *"The people of Daraa are known for their agriculture and trade, so if you have work abroad, you must have land to cultivate"* [RE18-Z]. This regional disposition was further highlighted by another refugee entrepreneur originating from Daraa: *"Because we are merchants and are well-known in trade and export... I am accustomed to being my own boss, and I do not like to be governed by anyone, and this is how we were raised in Daraa"* [RE13-Z]. This therefore suggests how pre-displacement rural identities continued

to shape entrepreneurial agency despite ventures having to adapt to more urban market environments. Moreover, these regional identities further shaped market cooperation within the Zaatari ecosystem: *"There is none [competition], because we are all cousins in this field of work and we are all from the same village, and now my cousin works on maintaining his shop, so any order that comes to him, he sends it to me because we are a family and there is no competition like this"* [RE9-Z]. This cooperative rather than competitive approach to entrepreneurship reflected rural community norms effectively being transplanted into a foreign camp environment, thereby catalysing business collaborations not typically found in conventional urban settings.

6.1.2.1.3. Education-to-Entrepreneurship

The pivot from educational pursuits to entrepreneurship in Zaatari revealed how camp conditions often forced premature transitions into business ownership. For many young refugees, the camp environment necessitated abandoning educational aspirations in favour of economic survival: *"When I came here, I was almost 18 years old and was completing my studies in Syria... But given the situation here, I stopped studying and went to work"* [RE11-Z]. The decision to leave education was commonly framed not as personal choice but as familial responsibility, particularly for young men who assumed provider roles at early ages. As one young refugee entrepreneur explained: *"I was in school, but I stopped when we arrived (in the camp)... Honestly, my mother was old, and we were young. I decided to work to help her and support my family. We didn't have anything except work"* [RE20-Z]. The weight of family support was similarly echoed by RE3-Z: *"I work because I am the eldest in the family, and we are a family of 8 people. My father is old and sick and cannot work, so that is why I needed to leave school and start working"*. These transitions from student to breadwinner exemplified an exponential rise in life stage progression whereby many young refugees appeared to forcefully forfeit the usual developmental phases associated with full-time education to unfortunately assume economic responsibilities prematurely.

These educational disruptions manifested in different ways. Some refugees managed to complete basic education within the camp before entering business: *"I was still a student and completed my studies here until grade 12 in the camp. Then I went out to work in a towel factory...came back to the camp and opened a clothing store"* [RE16-Z]. Others experienced

more abrupt interruptions to their schooling: *"I did not finish my studies. I was only in the ninth grade when I needed to leave school and go to work."* [RE12-Z].



Figure 37: RE12-Z described dropping out of school to run his business

For some, the transition resulted from a perceived futility of education based on personal experience as exemplified by the following caption: *"Before that, I was a school student, but I did not succeed in studying, so I decided to leave school and go to the farms and work as a worker"* [RE8-Z]. This therefore suggests that displacement created not just economic barriers to education but also psychological inhibitors that appeared to further facilitate a transition to entrepreneurship. Thus, the pivot from full-time student to full-time entrepreneur demonstrates how camp conditions coupled with personal circumstances appeared to transform assumed career trajectories. Hence, rather than taking the conventional educational route towards an occupational profession back home, many of these young refugees found themselves reconfiguring their internal schematics around entrepreneurial activities due to encampment. The young mobile phone shop owner, 21 [RE25-Z] and the barber [RE21-Z], 19, both exemplify how the environment (context) seemingly catalysed transitions (conduct) into entrepreneurship that may have not happened if they were not displaced.

Moreover, a further thematic nuance surfaced wherein parent entrepreneurship was customarily passed down to progenies thus becoming a further mechanism for disrupting educational practices as exemplified by the following statement: *"When I came here, I was almost 18 years old and was completing my studies in Syria... But given the situation here, I stopped studying and went to work with my father because he was operating the cart and was getting old. I wanted to help him. After he passed away, I continued the work alone on the cart"* [RE11-Z]. This expression therefore illustrates how entrepreneurship was not merely an economic must for some, but a means of continuing parental legacies in spite of encampment.

However, some young refugee entrepreneurs reported the disdain of extended family members on their entrepreneurial pursuits in place of education, evidenced by the following statement: *"The biggest thing was the negative talk from my family and their lack of encouragement for me because I wanted to leave school and work, and my father was the only one who encouraged me, and the rest of the family was against me"* [RE8-Z]. This resistance therefore highlights that intergenerational discussions surrounding educational ambitions versus entrepreneurship take-up routinely occur within displaced and encamped families.

The interview with RE8-Z further accentuated a progressive pattern of occupational pivots for aspiring entrepreneurs: *"I decided to leave school and go to the farms and work as a worker, and I was getting paid 7 dinars a day, but it did not work for me, so I decided to learn a profession and started learning how to become a barber in the camp, and then I trained at the shops here, but he did not give me much, so I decided to work on my own (business)".* This demonstrates how educational disruption in this case initiated a series of occupational pivots rather than a simple binary transition. Similarly, RE13-Z statement further supported the notion of multiple occupational shifts during encampment: *"I came to the camp in 2012 when I was 12 years old. I learned this work from my uncles in the camp because they were clothing merchants in Syria... I trained with them for two years and opened this shop a month ago. Before that, I was a slaughterhouse worker"*. This trend therefore suggests that camp entrepreneurship emerged not as an immediate response to dropping out of school, but as the result of continual occupational development.

The transition from education-to-entrepreneurship was often reported to be a means of attaining autonomy that traditional employment failed to provide as exemplified by RE13-Z statement: *"Initially, I was uncomfortable working for others and wasn't getting a good salary. Here, I'm*

my own boss and don't have a manager. Any money I make is mine, even if it's less than a job salary. It's still better because I'm comfortable" [RE13-Z]. Correspondingly, RE3-Z expressed: *"It is the only job in which I am my own boss, and all the money is mine, and I do not need to work for anyone. Although I tried to work for business owners, I found working alone to be better and more profitable"* [RE3-Z]. This need for autonomy therefore suggests that while educational cessation initially forced transitions into wage labour, entrepreneurship represented a subsequent adaptive response that reclaimed aspects of self-determination lost through both educational disruption and subordinate employment. Despite many refugee entrepreneurs being school dropouts, these young entrepreneurs conveyed educated comparisons between wage labour and entrepreneurship, implying a level of economic consciousness in spite of no formal qualifications.

Whilst many young refugees reported a complete abandonment of their academic pursuits, others embarked on alternative training pathways as evidenced by the barber's statement: *"With the Lutheran Organisation (i.e. Church federation) ... I attended a free training course for three months"* [RE21-Z]. In similar vein, others drew upon family connections to provide informal internship opportunities: *"I learned this work from my uncles in the camp because they were clothing merchants in Syria... I trained with them for two years"* [RE13-Z], and RE8-Z statement: *"It was a hobby of mine because I have 5 barbers in my family, and my uncle had a shop in Syria, and I used to spend time with him, and I loved the profession"*. These examples therefore illustrate how disruptions to traditional learning led not to a complete abandonment of learning per se, but rather a redirection to more applicable vocational skills suited towards camp living. This therefore contrasts with traditional education where occupational skills usually develop following completion, demonstrating how many refugee entrepreneurs reconfigured their occupational pathways in response to their environment. Additionally, the speed to which some of these young refugee entrepreneurs learned new occupational skills was noticeable in the interview data: *"I learned it in about a year. Barbering isn't difficult if you focus and practice regularly"* [RE21-Z]. These examples of fast-track or on the job learning typically contrasts with the slower progression commonly associated with formal education pathways that often evade the entrepreneurial milieu. Thus, these vocational pathways albethey formal or informal underscored the key skills that were directly applicable to market opportunities within a camp context.



Figure 38: "Life in the camp is tough, but it taught us responsibility" [RE20-Z]

The psychological spinoffs of these entrepreneurial pivots exposed examples of identity reconfiguration. For instance, RE20-Z described how his transition from student to entrepreneur fundamentally transformed his self-perception and worldview: *"Honestly, the camp taught us patience and adapting to circumstances. At first, it was hard, but we got used to it. Work has become part of our life. I couldn't live without work"*. RE20-Z further remarked: *"Life in the camp is tough, but it taught us responsibility. Since I was young, I've worked in the camp. That's what made me learn how to face challenges. If I had been somewhere else, I wouldn't have learned this easily"*.

These statements reflect that while disruptions to education were interpreted as loss, a new internalised entrepreneurial identity was subsequently formed thus filling this void. Furthermore, these instances of entrepreneurial transition appeared to extend beyond individual identity to encompass maturation and responsibility as exemplified by the caption *"...If I had been somewhere else, I wouldn't have learned this easily"* [RE20-Z]. This therefore conceptualises educational disruption not as deficiency per se, but as a mechanism for change agency centred around pragmatism over formal credentials. In sum, these statements typify the idiomatic phrase relating to the 'school of hard knocks', referring to the refugee journey towards entrepreneurship.

Moreover, many of these entrepreneurial pivots were accompanied by statements that suggested agency potential. Thus, rather than focusing on the long-term, many refugee entrepreneurs spoke of the immediate term as exemplified by RE11-Z statement: *"With the cart, there's limited room for development. However, I want to open my own shop and install a coffee machine and a juice machine, and perhaps an ice cream machine for the summer"*. Others expressed more long-term planning for business expansion: *"Now I'm renting and paying 70 dinars, but I have a partner. If I didn't have a partner, I wouldn't be able to work here and pay the full amount because I have children and need money to spend on them. So, I'm thinking about buying this entire store in the future to increase my profit"* [RE13-Z].

In juxtaposition, other young refugee entrepreneurs maintained some degree of educational drive, however these were conceptualised as continual professional development linked to their existing business rather than transitioning back to traditional educational pathways: *"For some time now, I have been wanting to learn women's hairdressing, and there was a course in the camp, but I did not get the interview, and I want to learn it. If I travel outside Jordan, I will learn this thing and work in it because I love it"* [RE8-Z]. However, other young entrepreneurs professed to eventually wanting to escape their current entrepreneurial predicament for better opportunities: *"I don't want to stay on this donkey (cart) all my life. I'm thinking of learning a profession and working in factories or outside the camp in a good job"* [RE3-Z]. These examples of agency potential show that entrepreneurship was often perceived as being transient rather than a long-term outlook by some of these young entrepreneurs, despite it initially replacing formal educational pathways.

In sum, many of these forced transitions from education-to-entrepreneurship contrasted markedly with Azraq's more regulated environment, where institutional constraints on business ownership often prevented similar adaptations, even when education was disrupted. While Zaatari's environment enabled these educational-to-entrepreneurial pivots more seamlessly, albeit often through necessity rather than choice, Azraq's regulatory framework provided fewer avenues for young refugees to transform educational disruption into entrepreneurial opportunity.

6.1.2.2. Transformative Nostalgia

The notion of transformative nostalgia describes how refugees' complex relationship with their country of origin essentially became a reinforcing factor to their social and economic re-

embeddedness. Thus, distinct from traditional homesickness, this form of nostalgia can be conceptualised as the transformation of homeland memories connections into foundations for establishing new economic and social structures. While many refugees considered the idea of return, for most, it was viewed through the lens of pragmatic assessment rather than immediate intention. Ultimately, this led many refugee entrepreneurs forecasting and planning their futures thus accepting the reality of prolonged encampment, while channelling their connection to homeland into productive adaptation.

Fundamentally, the theme of transformative nostalgia exemplifies the refugees evolving relationship with their homeland, essentially becoming a contributing factor for lasting institutional change. Essentially this theme demonstrates how memories and connections to Syria were not abandoned but rather repurposed to fuel entrepreneurial drive and community building within a camp setting. Accordingly, the theme of transformative nostalgia was supported by three first order concepts: the *reality of traumatic experiences*, the *priority for safety over repatriation* and the *formation of new roots*.

6.1.2.2.1. *Reality of Traumatic Experiences*

The entrepreneurial ventures in Zaatari emerged against a backdrop of profound personal trauma and loss, creating a complex relationship with refugees' former lives in Syria. For many, the weight of family separation and loss cast a shadow over their present circumstances: *"I have a son there who has been gone for 12 years, and we know nothing about him"* [RE6-Z]. These unresolved traumas of missing or deceased family members created deep emotional wounds, as one refugee poignantly shared: *"Of course, it broke my heart because I lost my eldest son 12 days before I came here. He was only 27 years old"* [RE14-Z].

The forced exodus from Syria generated lasting psychological impacts that refugees actively transformed into entrepreneurial motivation. While many professed to emotional trauma: *"We fled out of fear for our families and daughters from the unjust regime...there are people who suffered from mental illness, heart disease, and diabetes because of their anger at leaving their homeland"* [RE5-Z] – they appeared to intentionally filter these emotions into constructive agency than remaining as passive victims. As RE5-Z further remarked: *"But we have to work and live, and this is the reason that has influenced us to work and bring security to our people"*, thereby signifying a deliberate effort to reconfigure traumatic experiences to further

transform their emotional wounds into motivational fuel. Likewise, RE4-Z alluded to these traumatic experiences essentially becoming a springboard for entrepreneurship agency: *"..I was affected because I lost my home, my farm, and all my possessions in the war, but here I gained the security of myself and my family (through this business), and this is the most important thing to me"*. Moreover, RE11-Z spoke of the loss of his previous livelihood: *"We had a perfume shop in Syria, but after the war, we were unable to sell it and lost everything, so we had to start from scratch"* [RE11-Z].



Figure 39: "I have a son there (Syria) who has been gone for 12 years, and we know nothing about him" [RE6-Z]

The impact of these losses extended beyond mere financial setbacks, affecting multiple dimensions of refugees' lives: *"It definitely affected work, life, psychology, money, and education because it was a war in which we lost everything"* [RE17-Z]. This total disruption of established livelihoods meant that entrepreneurship in Zaatari was not simply about business creation but rather represented an attempt to reconstruct shattered economic identities and rebuild from comprehensive loss. While Zaatari's less regulated environment enabled refugees

to pursue this economic reconstruction through independent enterprise, Azraq's more controlled structure often constrained such autonomous attempts at livelihood recovery, adding another layer of loss through restricted economic agency. This profound sense of economic and material loss, however, was counterbalanced by a striking prioritisation of physical safety, leading many refugees to accept their displacement despite its costs. In sum, these outward instances of using trauma to engender future-oriented action demonstrates how some refugee entrepreneurs were able to exercise internal frames of agency amidst new constraints, thereby rebuffing past experiences and traumatic memories to determine their economic futures.

6.1.2.2.2. Prioritising Safety Over Return

In spite of the profound sense of loss and displacement, refugees in Zaatari consistently prioritised safety over the desire to return home, revealing a sobering recognition of Syria's ongoing instability. Their narratives reflected intimate knowledge of continued dangers: *"...this [Syria] is my country, but now it is without security or stability to the point that any police can beat you and even kill you because there is no one to hold them accountable"* [RE6-Z]. This stark assessment of homeland conditions shaped their decision-making about return. Furthermore, family responsibilities played a crucial role in this prioritisation of safety, with many refugees viewing their role as protectors as paramount to any desire for repatriation: *"I want to return, but the conditions there are unsafe and there is no stability...I have a large family of 8 that I cannot risk"* [RE9-Z]. This emphasis on family security over homeland connection demonstrated how the trauma of displacement had reshaped refugees' relationship with their native country.

The depth of this safety-first mentality was particularly evident in how refugees viewed their business investments in the camp. Despite establishing successful enterprises, they maintained a theoretical willingness to abandon these achievements for a safe return: *"If it were safe and my family and I could return, I would go back and sell everything in this store, including the store itself. But there's no guarantee for life there"* [RE16-Z]. This readiness to sacrifice business success for security underscored how profoundly safety concerns outweighed other considerations, including economic stability and homeland attachment. Ultimately, this prioritisation of safety, while precluding immediate return to Syria, created conditions for refugees to establish new foundations within the camp environment.



Figure 40: RE9-Z unwilling to risk the safety of his family

6.1.2.2.3. Formation of New Roots

The establishment of new foundations within Zaatari reflected a complex process where initial temporary refuge evolved into more permanent settlement, driven by the achievement of fundamental security needs. For some refugees, this transition to permanence emerged through the combination of safety and economic autonomy: *"I have security, and I own my own business. I have settled here and do not even think about returning"* [RE2-Z]. The formation of these new roots was anchored primarily in the successful establishment of family security. Refugees consistently emphasised how the camp provided a stable environment for their loved ones: *"Here I gained the security of myself and my family, and this is the most important thing to me"* [RE4-Z]. This prioritisation of family safety extended beyond mere physical protection to encompass broader welfare considerations: *"We came here, I found safety for my family and treatment, and this is the best thing"* [RE7-Z].

The longer-term implications of this process were apparent in how some refugees framed their future plans around camp permanence rather than repatriation: *"I won't go back. There's no safety, and there's no work there"* [RE22-Z]. This rejection of return therefore indicates a fundamental shift from viewing the camp as merely a temporary abode to seeing it as the foundation for long-term life planning. The economic dimensions of this shift were further evident in entrepreneurial future planning as exemplified by the following statement: *"I'm thinking of enlarging the store and bringing in new materials, and perhaps selling household appliances in the future to expand my scope of work"* [RE16-Z]. Similarly, another entrepreneur detailed plans for business diversification: *"I thought of adding a place for barbecue here, selling barbecue on a regular basis, and starting to work on meat. This has a good scope because it is considered a distinctive dish"* [RE9-Z]. Thus, these forward-looking business plans expose how root-formation extends beyond mere acceptance of the present realm to active construction of future trajectories within the camp context.



Figure 41: "I trained them (my children) for the job. I always taught them that work is the best way, and if they don't succeed in their studies, work will help them" [RE24-Z]

Moreover, intergenerational dimensions further fed into the long-term nature of this root-formation process. Some refugee entrepreneurs spoke of their business re-orientation to form sustainable livelihoods for their children: *"I trained them for the job. I always taught them that*

work is the best way, and if they don't succeed in their studies, work will help them" [RE24-Z]. This dissemination of knowledge to the next generation further typifies the notion of long-term settlement, whereby refugee entrepreneurs were actively seen to be preparing their children for business succession within the camp rather than repatriating them to their country of origin.

This process of putting down new roots manifested differently between the camps. While Zaatari's more flexible environment coupled with its homogenous population allowed refugees to establish both economic and social foundations through entrepreneurship and community building, Azraq's more regulated structure combined with its heterogeneous population seemingly constrained such organic settlement processes thus creating greater dependency on institutional support systems rather than community-generated resilience.

6.2. REPRODUCTIVE THEMES

In contrast to the transformative themes observed prior, the subsequent reproductive themes illustrate actions through which refugees in Azraq (Case 2) largely reproduced or reinforced existing institutional constraints. In sum, these themes manifest primarily through the aggregate dimensions of Fragmented Agency - where Azraq's refugees experienced limitations in leveraging social capital due to re-embedding heterogeneity and dependency networks, thereby diminishing their transformative capacity; and Partial Transformation - where economic activities achieved only limited alteration of internal structures, manifesting through subordinate occupational pivots coupled with paralysing nostalgic sentiments that hindered entrepreneurial action. Combined, these elements constitute the reproductive forces through which refugee conduct in Azraq largely maintained rather than transformed Azraq's institutional landscape. Similarly, this reproductive dimension exists along the same spectrum as transformative capacity, albeit positioned toward the more constrained end of conduct continuum. Thus, agency within this spectrum ranges from minor internal adjustments that reinforce existing social structures to incomplete attempts at transformation that fail to achieve institutional change. Essentially, these reproductive patterns emerged in response to the constraining conditions identified in the preceding context analysis. Figure 42 provides the outline coding structure for this reproductive dimension, highlighting the relevant aggregate themes, second order and first order thematic underpinnings (Gioia, 2021).

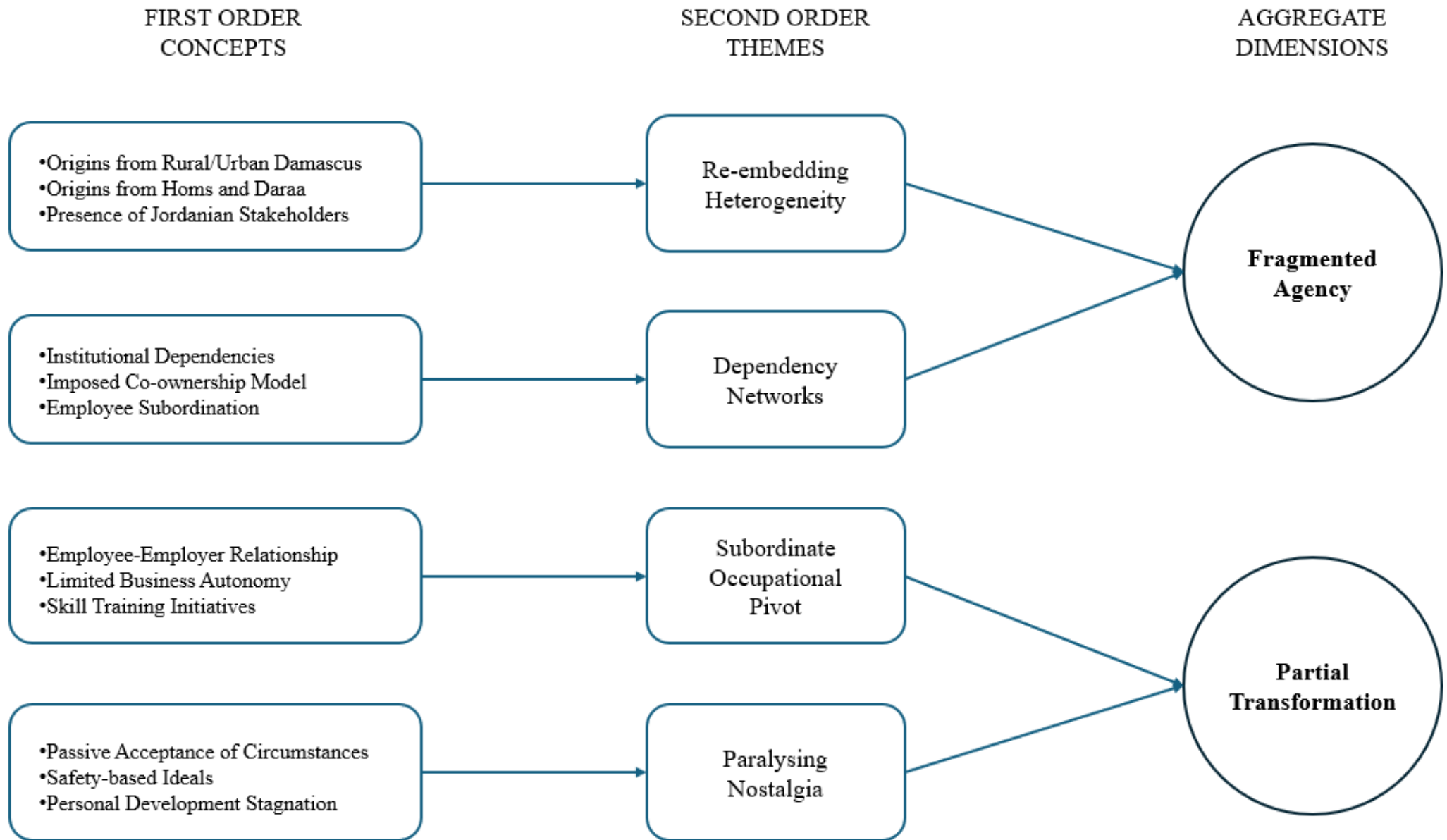


Figure 42: Reproductive themes within the frame of Conduct Analysis

6.2.1. FRAGMENTED AGENCY

The theoretical dimension of fragmented agency illustrates how refugees in Azraq responded to the camp's demographic composition and design constraints, resulting in more individualised expressions of agency. Unlike in Zaatari, where refugees leveraged homogeneous backgrounds to amplify collective action through pre-existing networks, refugees in Azraq accepted secondary means to exercise agency within a heterogeneous population. While many refugees were seen to demonstrate individual adaptability, their attempts at collective action on the whole were clearly hindered by both demographic diversity and spatial organisation. This could be evidenced in two ways: through the conception of re-embedding heterogeneity, demonstrated by refugees' diverse origins, and through the emergence of dependency networks, where Syrian entrepreneurs became subordinate to Jordanian business partners over time. Collectively, these mechanisms surfaced to demonstrate how entrepreneurship agency in Azraq was profoundly fragmented from both social and economic perspectives thereby leading to the reproduction or preservation of institutional constraints. Thus, the conceptions of *re-embedding heterogeneity* and *dependency networks* ultimately served as the dimensions second-order supporting concepts.

6.2.1.1. Re-embedding Heterogeneity

Contrasting the largely homogeneous population primarily drawn from the province of Daraa in Zaatari, the Azraq camp embodied a more diverse assortment of Syrian origins – from the capital of Damascus to its rural outskirts, further extending to the region of Homs, and other municipality regions in Syria such as Daraa. Additionally, the presence of Jordanian stakeholders further diversified this population mix. Invariably, this array created a profoundly different social and economic landscape as the pre-existing networks observed in Zaatari were non-existent in Azraq due to its heterogeneous population. As one UN official remarked: *"people [in Azraq] come from different parts of Syria... there's a lot of mix of different [people] and also urbanites and people more who have come from the towns or the villages"* [UN-UP]. Furthermore, Table 10 (Chapter 4, page 124) illustrates the diversity in Syrian origins relating to Azraq's residents. Essentially, the notion of population heterogeneity was supported by the following first order concepts: *refugee origins in rural and urban Damascus, origins from Homs and Daraa, and the presence of Jordanian stakeholders*.

6.2.1.1.1. Origins from Rural and Urban Damascus

The heterogeneous composition of Azraq's population reflected a diverse mix of backgrounds from Syria's capital. Thus, refugees originated from both urban and rural areas around Damascus as exemplified in the ensuing statements: *"We are about ten kilometres away from Damascus"* [RE2-A], and: *"I am from the Damascus countryside"* [RE3-A], *"I lived in the Damascus countryside"* [RE4-A]. Invariably, these varied origins brought different occupational backgrounds, and skillsets to the camp. For example, some refugees had agricultural experience and assets in their homeland: *"Before in Syria, I was a farmer and a landowner near Damascus. We used to cultivate the land in Damascus countryside. I had 50 sheep in the Damascus countryside"* [RE12-A]. Others came from more contrasting urban and educational backgrounds: *"I was studying at Damascus University"* [RE14-A].



Figure 43: *"We are about ten kilometres away from Damascus"* [RE2-A]

In sum, this diversity of origins and experiences contrasted sharply with Zaatari's more homogeneous population from Daraa. While Zaatari's shared regional identity facilitated the re-embedding of familiar social and economic patterns, Azraq's heterogeneous population contributed to a more fragmented community structure, lacking the unified economic practices that characterised Zaatari's development. Essentially, this diversity of refugees was further

complemented by a significant population from Homs, adding another layer to Azraq's heterogeneous community composition.

6.2.1.1.2. Origins from Homs and Daraa

The heterogeneous mix of Azraq was further evidenced by a significant population from Homs, as refugees openly identified their origins: *"I'm [Syrian] from Homs"* [RE1-A], and *"I am from Homs in Syria"* [RE9-A]. These Homs-origin refugees brought diverse occupational backgrounds, including construction experience: *"I used to work in construction in Homs before the war"* [RE6-A]. Furthermore, the timing of displacement varied among this group, with some fleeing early in the conflict: *"We came from Homs when I was 10 at the beginning of the war"* [RE7-A]. This variation in arrival times added another layer of diversity to the camp's population makeup.



Figure 44: RE6-A "I used to work in construction in Homs before the war"

Essentially, the presence of multiple origin points within Azraq, namely Damascus, Homs, and other regions - stood in stark contrast to Zaatari's predominantly Daraa-based population. While Zaatari benefited from the shared cultural and economic practices of its homogeneous

population, Azraq's more diverse origins contributed to a more fragmented social and economic environment, seemingly lacking the unified community patterns that facilitated Zaatari's organic development. This heterogeneous mix of refugees from Damascus and Homs was further diversified by a smaller contingent from Daraa, though their presence in Azraq manifested differently from their counterparts in Zaatari. For example, their backgrounds reflected diverse occupational experiences: *"I am from Daraa in Syria... I was in Syria working in a supermarket for my family before coming here"* [RE8-A]. Some had operated substantial businesses in their homeland: *"I had a real estate company that produced building materials and ceramics in Daraa, Syria, and I also used to do accounts there because my studies were in economics and accounting"* [RE10-A]. However, unlike in Zaatari where Daraa's refugees formed a dominant, homogeneous population that could effectively transplant their business practices and social networks, in Azraq they not only represented a minority (i.e. 35% of entrepreneurs) but often found themselves in subordinate economic positions. As one Daraa refugee explained: *"No, I am just an employee here because it is difficult to open your own shop as it requires capital, and my monthly salary does not exceed 130 or 135 dinars... Even with my salary and the monthly credit card, I can barely cover my and my family's needs"* [RE8-A].

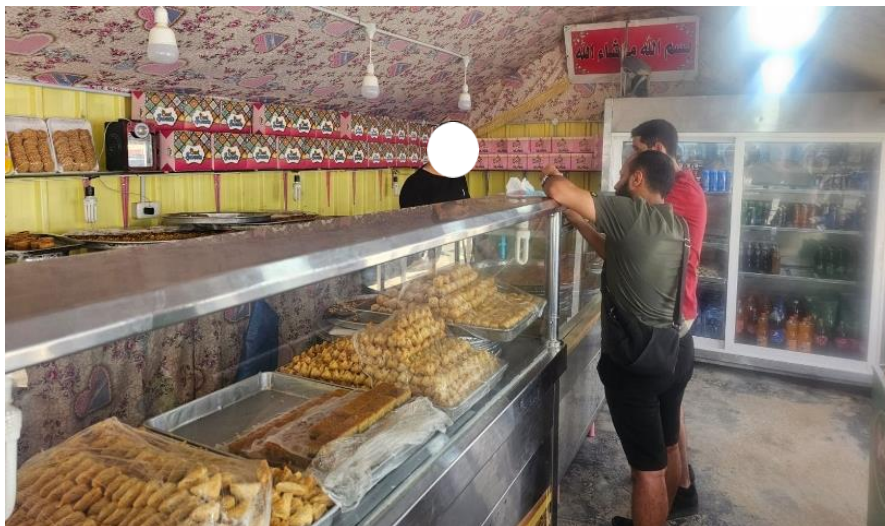


Figure 45: Azraq employee [RE8-A] originating from Daraa

Fundamentally, this combination of minority status and economic constraints, alongside Azraq's more regulated and concrete environment, appeared to prevent refugees from

recreating the kind of concentrated commercial networks that embodied Zaatari's development. Furthermore, the presence of Jordanian stakeholders in the business sector further diluted any possibility of cohesive refugee-led business networks from emerging.

6.2.1.1.3. Presence of Jordanian Stakeholders

Azraq's institutional design deliberately integrated Jordanian stakeholders into the camp's commercial ecosystem through mandated partnership structures. The UN representative noted this was intentional policy: *"every kiosk and every business that opens up has to be somehow co-owned by a Jordanian and a Syrian"* [UN-UP], implemented *"to deal with these frustrations that some Jordanians were having"* [UN-UP]. This integration of Jordanian stakeholders often manifested as a landlord-tenant dynamic rather than true partnership as earlier cited. The pattern became widespread throughout the camp's commercial spaces: *"Jordanians can buy shops from here and work in them like the camp residents, but most of them rent their shops to the camp residents"* [RE4-A].



Figure 46: One of many Jordanian-owned camp businesses in Azraq

Essentially, this mandated inclusion of Jordanian stakeholders contrasted sharply with Zaatari's more autonomous business environment, where refugees maintained complete control over

their commercial ventures. The presence of Jordanian stakeholders in Azraq thus represented another way in which institutional design constrained refugee economic independence seemingly diluting the refugee composition. This in turn, contributed to the camp's more fragmented and dependent business ecosystem.

6.2.1.2. Dependency Networks

Unlike Zaatari's organic and autonomous development, Azraq's business activities appeared to be symbolised by institutionally prescribed systems of reliance whereby Syrian refugees were often dependent on external Jordanian business partners or employers to operate camp enterprises. This government-imposed initiative appeared to be exclusive to the Azraq camp, as a means to appease local Jordanian populations who were also in need for welfare. Resultantly, a seemingly two-tiered business environment was artificially created in Azraq to cater for the needs of the local population and the newly arrived refugees. Fundamentally, the subdimension of dependency networks was supported by the following first order concepts: *institutional dependencies*, the *imposed co-ownership model*, and the actualisation of *subordination to employers*.

6.2.1.2.1. Institutional Dependencies

Azraq's commercial environment was characterised by multiple layers of institutional dependency, beginning with the delayed implementation of market spaces. As noted by the UN representative, *"it took quite a while actually for the market spaces to open...maybe two years later"* [UN-UP], creating an initial period where refugees were entirely dependent on institutional supply channels. Once established, business operations remained tightly controlled through various institutional mechanisms. Supply chains were heavily regulated: *"Through permits, we leave the camp and go to the area near us, such as Al-Wahdat or Zarqa, and bring goods"* [RE4-A], with formal procedures required for importing goods: *"I send him what I want and submit a request to him here to enter the camp"* [RE14-A]. Even routine resupply followed strict institutional protocols: *"A transport vehicle comes to the camp every 3 days, and I buy from it"* [RE17-A].

Essentially, access to business spaces was similarly constrained by institutional controls unlike Zaatari's sheer number of commercial units: *"The only way I could get my own place is if*

someone leaves the camp for good" [RE3-A]. Thus, these overlapping dependencies created a system where refugees remained reliant on institutional approval and processes for virtually every aspect of business operation as exemplified in the imposed co-ownership model, contrasting sharply with Zaatari's more autonomous environment.



Figure 47: "The only way I could get my own place is if someone leaves the camp for good"
[RE3-A]

6.2.1.2.2. Imposed Co-ownership Model

Azraq's dependency networks were fundamentally shaped by an institutionally mandated co-ownership system. This structural requirement that *"every kiosk and every business that opens up has to be somehow co-owned by a Jordanian and a Syrian"* [UN-UP] created inherent dependencies from the outset enabling Jordanian traders access to the Azraq marketplace. The limited allocation of business spaces further reinforced these dependency relationships: *"I just rent the place because the camp gave out shops in 2016, and they are all gone by now"* [RE3-A]. This scarcity of commercial opportunities led to a system where *"Jordanians can buy shops from here and work in them like the camp residents, but most of them rent their shops to the camp residents"* [RE4-A]. Moreover, the number of dedicated retail spaces appeared to be

institutional capped at Azraq as the official number of these businesses was just 375. Thus, the Azraq model represented a stark contrast to Zaatari's autonomous business environment that boasted over 1,800 retail spaces, establishing dependency networks that institutionalised refugee reliance on external stakeholders rather than fostering independent entrepreneurial development. As earlier cited, these institutionally imposed partnership arrangements naturally evolved into relationships of employee subordination, further exhibiting patterns of dependency within Azraq's commercial sector.

6.2.1.2.3. *Employee Subordination*

The result of Azraq's dependency networks customarily manifested in widespread employee subordination. Refugees frequently found themselves unable to achieve business ownership due to financial barriers: *"No, I am just an employee here because it is difficult to open your own shop as it requires capital"* [RE-4], a situation echoed by others: *"I am just an employee here because it is difficult to open your own shop as it requires capital"* [RE8-A].



Figure 48: "I am just an employee... there is injustice to the worker because he pays me only five dinars to work 12 hours a day" [RE14-A]

This employee status often led to exploitative working conditions: *"I am not the shop owner here, I am just an employee... there is injustice to the worker because he pays me only five dinars to work 12 hours a day"* [RE14-A].

Such subordinate positions stood in stark contrast to Zaatari's environment where refugees could more readily establish independent businesses. Essentially, this pattern of employee subordination represented the final layer of Azraq's dependency networks, where institutional structures and financial barriers combined to keep refugees in subordinate positions rather than enabling the kind of entrepreneurial independence seen in Zaatari.

6.2.2. PARTIAL TRANSFORMATION

The aggregate dimension of partial transformation relates to how refugee adaptation in the second camp, Azraq, remained largely confined within the domain of individual-level transformation. Owing to this limitation, there were little to no examples of broader structural transformation in this camp compared to the precursor camp, Zaatari. While internal changes appeared to lead to structural transformation in Zaatari, the overture of design structures in Azraq seemingly restricted refugee agency to individual-level change exclusively. Essentially, the notion of partial transformation was exhibited through two mechanisms: the advent of a subordinate occupational pivot whereby refugees essentially became employees rather than independent entrepreneurs: *"I am not the shop owner here, I am just an employee"* [RE14-A], and resigned nostalgia, whereby aggregate psychological constraint effectively upheld their subordinate status within the camp. Ultimately, the net outcome of these mechanisms resulted in the reproduction of institutional constraints rather than phenomenon of institutional transformation. Invariably, the conceptions of *subordinate occupational pivot* and paralysing nostalgia ultimately formed as the dimensions second-order concepts:

6.2.2.1. Subordinate Occupational Pivot

The concept of the subordinate occupational pivot essentially describes how Azraq refugees' occupational shifts were largely hampered by structural constraints that effectively made them subordinate to Jordanian business partners. While refugees in Zaatari enjoyed total ownership of their camp businesses, the case of Azraq highlighted several instances that ostensibly relegated refugees to the status of employee. This form of subservience was institutionally

imposed through policy as previously outlined by the UN representative. On the surface, this policy was implemented to placate Jordanians who felt aggrieved by the level of humanitarian largesse being provided to Syrian refugees, however, the byproduct of this policy seemingly resulted in Jordanians enjoying a significant share of the camp's marketplace. Thus, for many refugees in Azraq, the reality of operating their own camp business appeared fictional. While occupational adaptation could be demonstrated in the Azraq camp, instances remained largely within a dependency framework rather than occurrences of self-sufficient enterprise. Ultimately this second order theme was reinforced by the following first order concepts: an *employee-employer relationship*, *limited business autonomy* and *employment training initiatives*.

6.2.2.1.1. *Employee-Employer Relationship*

In Azraq, institutional constraints channelled many of its refugees into dependent employment positions rather than enabling business ownership. Table 10 (page 124) captures several instances of refugees holding the position of employee or subtenant rather than sole proprietor. Moreover, the initial allocation of business spaces in Azraq created lasting barriers to entrepreneurship according to one refugee: *"No, I just rent the place because the camp gave out shops in 2016, and they are all gone by now"* [RE3-A]. This limited distribution of commercial spaces effectively forced many refugees into employee positions rather than business ownership. Financial barriers further reinforced this employment dependency according to one refugee voice: *"I am just an employee here because it is difficult to open your own shop as it requires capital"* [RE8-A]. Thus, the combination of limited access to business spaces and capital requirements created conditions where employment, often under exploitative terms, became the only option. This was evidenced by the poor working conditions some refugees faced: *"I am not the shop owner here, I am just an employee... there is injustice to the worker because he pays me only five dinars to work 12 hours a day"* [RE14-A].

Furthermore, the pattern of immediate entry into employment upon arrival for some refugees: *"When I arrived, I started working as an employee at a restaurant"* [RE20-A], further suggests how institutional structures in Azraq systematically reproduced traditional employee-employer relationships rather than enabling the kind of entrepreneurial independence seen in Zaatari. Moreover, the institutional design of Azraq's commercial sector enforced a system of co-ownership that fundamentally altered the nature of RE. This policy, implemented from the

camp's inception, required that *"every kiosk and every business that opens up has to be somehow Co owned by a Jordanian and a Syrian"* [UN-UP]. However, rather than fostering genuine partnerships with locals, this mandate often resulted in arrangements where refugees became subordinate to Jordanian business interests. Essentially, the reality of this co-ownership model frequently manifested as a landlord-tenant relationship rather than true business partnerships: *"The main owner of the shop is Jordanian, and for whom I work for..."* [RE4-A]. This dynamic was widespread throughout the camp's commercial sector, as *"Jordanians can buy shops from here and work in them like the camp residents, but most of them rent their shops to the camp residents"* [RE4-A].



Figure 49: RE4-A described working for a Jordanian business owner

This mandated co-ownership structure thus perpetuated a system of occupational subordination, where refugees' entrepreneurial aspirations were constrained by institutional policies that maintained external stakeholder control over refugee economic independence. Unlike Zaatari's autonomous business environment, Azraq's co-ownership requirement systematically reproduced existing power structures that limited the transformative capacity of Azraq's refugees. Fundamentally, this institutionalised subordination mirrored a broader pattern of constrained economic relationships, where refugees often found themselves locked

into dependent employee-employer dynamics rather than achieving full entrepreneurial agency.

Invariably, this reliance on employment represented another way in which institutional design maintained existing power structures rather than facilitating refugee economic empowerment. In sum, this institutionalised channelling of refugees into dependent employment relationships reflected a broader limitation of business autonomy, where institutional structures restricted refugees' ability to make independent commercial decisions.

6.2.2.1.2. Limited Business Autonomy

In Azraq, institutional structures systematically constrained refugees' business autonomy through multiple mechanisms. The exploitative working conditions reflected how power imbalances limited economic independence: *"In our marketplace, there is injustice to the worker because he pays me only five dinars to work 12 hours a day, and the income becomes from 150 to 170 per month"* [RE14-A]. These conditions made it difficult for workers to accumulate the capital needed for business ownership.

The challenges of establishing new businesses further reinforced these constraints: *"Opening a new store is considered a very difficult thing, and if you pay attention, there are many stores that have closed again"* [RE18-A]. Even when refugees identified viable business opportunities, capital barriers prevented them from pursuing entrepreneurial aspirations: *"If I had capital, I would open a falafel shop again next to this shop... I am not talking about a large amount, only 1500"* [RE19-A].

Fundamentally, these examples of limited business autonomy stood in stark contrast to Zaatari's more permissive environment. While Zaatari's refugees could exercise greater control over their commercial activities, Azraq's institutional framework seemingly reproduced the conditions that restricted refugees' ability to achieve true business independence, maintaining their position of economic subordination through multiple, reinforcing constraints. These constraints on business autonomy led some refugees to pursue alternative paths to economic independence through institutional training programs.

5.2.2.1.3. Skills Training Initiatives

Azraq's institutional framework offered formal training programs as an alternative pathway to economic participation, though these remained within controlled parameters. The camp administration and NGOs provided structured learning opportunities in specific technical fields: *"I learned how to fix phones through a workshop provided by the camp and other organizations"* [RE7-A]. These training initiatives focused particularly on vocational skills that could lead to employment within the camp's existing business structure: *"From the camp itself and from an organisation that held sewing courses. After that, I started training for shops here in the camp"* [RE16-A]. This pattern continued across various sectors, with refugees receiving training in practical trades: *"The camp held courses for tailoring, and I learned how to make clothes there"* [RE18-A].

While these programs provided refugees with new skills, they primarily prepared participants for roles as employees rather than independent entrepreneurs. Unlike Zaatari, where refugees could freely apply acquired skills to start their own ventures, Azraq's training initiatives tended to reproduce existing employment structures rather than enabling true entrepreneurial independence. This approach reflected the camp's broader pattern of maintaining institutional control over economic activities while providing limited pathways for individual advancement.



Figure 50: RE7-A described attending a training workshop to learn how to fix phones for employment means

6.2.2.2. Paralyzing Nostalgia

The notion of paralyzing nostalgia surmises how the connection between Azraq's refugees' and their country of origin manifested as an inhibiting force rather than a catalyst for change. Whilst Zaatari's rendition of transformative nostalgia enabled refugees to channel memories into entrepreneurial action, Azraq's paralyzing form exhibited a more restrictive relationship with the past, where memories of homeland became an emotional barrier rather than motivational fuel. This exhibited in an inclination toward passive acceptance of present circumstances rather than active efforts to reshape their context. As a result, this immobilising relationship with the past reinforced the status quo in Azraq, with institutional constraints remaining largely unchallenged by its inhabitants.

Fundamentally, Azraq's paralyzing nostalgia aligns with the pattern of confined or partial transformation, whereby individual-level adaptations evidently failed to translate to structural change. Rather than utilising memories as tools for agency, refugees in Azraq appeared to experience nostalgia as an emotional anchor that appeared to limit their capacity for transformative action. In sum, this second order theme was supported by the following first order concepts: *passive acceptance of circumstances*, *safety-based ideals* and *development stagnation*.

6.2.2.2.1. Passive Acceptance of Circumstances

In Azraq, refugees exhibited a form of resigned acceptance that prioritised safety and stability over attempts to reshape their environment. This passive acceptance manifested primarily through an emphasis on security as compensation for difficult conditions: "*Although there are difficult days for me and my children financially, I would rather live in safety than the chaos that exists in Syria*" [RE4-A]. The value placed on stability was consistently emphasised: "*Here it is much better and safer, and there is stability in the camp*" [RE9-A], and "*The situation here is better now because there is security*" [RE12-A]. This acceptance was further reinforced by perceptions of limited alternatives in their homeland: "*If I return to Syria, what will I do there? There is nothing to eat or work in*" [RE2-A]. While refugees acknowledged their connection to Syria, their expressions of homesickness were tempered by pragmatic resignation: "*Syria is not stable, and there is no one who does not like to return to his country. But the conditions are difficult*" [RE8-A].



Figure 51: RE12-A described preferring camp safety and prospects over returning to Syria

Essentially these patterns of passive and economic acceptance contrasted sharply with Zaatari's more active response to displacement, where refugees channelled their homeland connections into transformative actions. In Azraq, the emphasis on safety and stability, while understandable, appeared to reinforce institutional constraints rather than challenge them, contributing to the reproduction of existing power structures within the camp. In sum, passive acceptance of circumstances appeared rooted in and reinforced by a strong prioritisation of safety, which shaped how refugees in Azraq viewed their situation and future prospects.

6.2.2.2.2. Safety-based Ideals

In Azraq, refugees' relationship with their displacement was fundamentally shaped by a prioritisation of safety that overshadowed other concerns about their circumstances. Their narratives consistently positioned security as the primary compensation for their current situation, even when acknowledging hardships: *"I would rather live in a camp than live in fear. Although there are difficult days for me and my children financially"* [RE4-A]. This emphasis on safety manifested particularly in relation to the Syrian regime, with refugees expressing clear preferences for camp life over return under unstable conditions: *"I would rather stay here*

than go back under the regime" [RE3-A]. The value placed on security extended to basic quality of life considerations, with refugees finding comfort in the camp's stability: "Of course, I want to return to Syria, but the situation there is neither safe nor stable. The situation here is better now because there is security, I can sleep comfortably" [RE12-A].

While this preoccupation with safety in Azraq appeared analogous to reports in Zaatari, the underlying difference between camps was a more apparent active response to displacement in Zaatari. Thus, Zaatari's refugees actively worked to transform their environment despite safety concerns, while Azraq's inhabitants appeared to trade agency for security, accepting institutional constraints as the price of stability. This safety-first mindset seemingly contributed to the camp's broader pattern of resigned nostalgia and passive acceptance of circumstances. This prioritisation of safety however, while providing basic security, came at the cost of personal and professional growth in Azraq, as refugees found themselves in an environment that offered limited opportunities for development.



Figure 52: "I would rather live in a camp than live in fear...although there are difficult days for me and my children financially" [RE4-A]

6.2.2.2.3. Development Stagnation

The emphasis on safety in Azraq, while providing physical security, created conditions where personal development seemingly became stagnant. This stagnation manifested both psychologically and developmentally. Thus, the trauma of conflict created lasting psychological barriers to return: *"If I return to Syria, I have a psychological condition. I became afraid of the people there"* [RE2-A], suggesting how fear itself had become an obstacle to growth.

The conditions in Syria were viewed as incompatible with personal development and life progression: *"I want to return, but the conditions are difficult, there is war, and living there does not help me grow or encourage me to build a family there"* [RE8-A]. Yet this recognition of Syria's limitations was not matched by opportunities for growth within Azraq, as refugees simply noted *"Living here does not help me grow"* [RE8-A]. This stagnation contrasted with Zaatari's environment, where refugees found ways to channel their circumstances into personal and professional development through entrepreneurial activities. In Azraq, the institutional emphasis on safety and control appeared to create conditions where basic security was achieved at the expense of personal growth and development, further reinforcing patterns of resigned acceptance rather than transformative action.

6.3. Chapter Summary

This chapter examined the entrepreneurial conduct of refugee entrepreneurs across Zaatari and Azraq, demonstrating how contextual conditions shape agency along a transformative-reproductive spectrum. In Zaatari, demographic homogeneity, organic institutional development, and concentrated social networks enabled transformative conduct through collective agency, emancipatory network formation, and dual transformation of both internal identities and external structures. Entrepreneurial pivots and transformative nostalgia further reinforced forward-looking agency under conditions of displacement. In Azraq, demographic heterogeneity, mandatory co-ownership requirements, and institutional completeness reproduced existing constraints, channelling agency toward subordinate occupational adaptation and paralysing rather than mobilising nostalgic connection to place of origin. Together, these contrasting conduct patterns illustrate how demographic composition, institutional design, and network configuration collectively determine whether entrepreneurial

agency produces transformative or reproductive outcomes. The following chapter integrates context and conduct analysis to address the study's three research questions.

CHAPTER 7: DISCUSSION

7.0. Introduction

The previous two chapters presented the methodological bracketing of analysis, thus examining context and conduct separately. Chapter 5 examined the institutional conditions shaping entrepreneurial environments along an enabling-constraining spectrum, while Chapter 6 analysed refugee entrepreneurial responses along a transformative-reproductive continuum. This discussion chapter now integrates these analytical segments to address the study's central research aim:

To examine the transformative capacity of refugee entrepreneurs within constrained institutional contexts (CICs)

Specifically, this analysis addresses the following three research questions (RQ):

1. How do constrained institutional contexts enable and constrain refugee agency?
2. Do refugee entrepreneurs contribute to the preservation, modification or challenging of existing structures, and how?
3. Do refugee entrepreneurs exhibit immunisation from institutional structures, and how does this immunity translate into transformative capacity?

The evidence shows that CICs operate along an enabling-constraining spectrum rather than as binary perspectives. In Zaatari, weak external institutional enforcement combined with spatial density and demographic homogeneity enabled refugee entrepreneurs to develop collective agency, while Azraq's strong external controls, spatial fragmentation, and demographic heterogeneity constrained entrepreneurial activity to individual adaptation. Refugee entrepreneurs contributed to structural transformation in Zaatari through the emergence of shadow institutions, that systematically eroded formal institutional authority over commercial activities. These shadow institutions both filled institutional voids and actively expanded those voids through erosive mechanisms, thereby achieving structural substitution. Conversely, in Azraq, entrepreneurial activities reproduced existing structures by operating within tightly controlled parameters that prevented collective organisation thus maintaining formal

institutional dominance. This comparative evidence shows that RE can function as a mechanism for either transformation or reproduction depending on whether shadow institutional formation is possible.

Zaatari's refugee entrepreneurs exhibited institutional immunisation, thereby operating with relative autonomy from formal control by achieving internal structural supremacy over external structures. Shadow institutions provided the protective bubble enabling this immunity through dual mechanisms: maintaining regulatory openings (stents) and weakening formal structures (antibodies). However, immunity was a collective structural property, not an individual characteristic. In Azraq, external institutional dominance prevented such arrangements from taking place, thus leaving entrepreneurs institutionally vulnerable. Transformative capacity therefore depends on external-internal (ES-IS) asymmetry (i.e. transformation surfaces when IS suppresses ES influence; reproduction occurs when the reverse happens).

Overall, the empirical evidence highlights complex dynamics where institutional constraints simultaneously limit and create opportunities for entrepreneurial agency, with entrepreneurial activities and practices serving as mechanisms for both structural transformation and reproduction depending on contextual configurations and demographic compositions. The analysis examines these agency-structure interactions across the theoretical sample (Case 1 – Zaatari and Case 2 – Azraq), showing how entrepreneurial activities either transform or reproduce institutional arrangements depending on contextual conditions. Each RQ therefore serves as the framework for the ensuing discussion sections, with this chapter concluding by positioning its theoretical contributions and limitations for future research directions.

7.1. HOW DO CONSTRAINED INSTITUTIONAL CONTEXTS ENABLE AND CONSTRAIN REFUGEE AGENCY?

The empirical evidence from this study outlines that CICs operate through complex mechanisms that limit and generate opportunities, thereby channelling refugee agency along context-dependent pathways. These mechanisms complement Refai et al.'s (2025) perspectives on constrained entrepreneurial agency. This study demonstrates how refugee agency operates across such pathways: first, through external structural constraints of the camp environment itself (i.e. agency in constrained contexts); second, through imposed positions based on refugee status and spatial location within camps, (i.e. constrained positions in context); and third, through collective reimagining of governance possibilities, as seen in Zaatari's shadow

institutions (interpretations and enactments of constraints). By examining all three dimensions, this study posits how CICs shape entrepreneurial action along varying pathways rather than uniformly blocking or permitting it.

Rather than simply restricting entrepreneurial activity per se, institutional constraints in the case of refugee camps appear to function along an enabling-constraining spectrum where the same structural factors can produce fundamentally different outcomes depending on their inception, configuration, and implementation. This finding therefore challenges the binary categorisations prevalent in extant literature, which positions institutional voids as either constraining (Mair and Marti, 2009; Webb et al., 2020) or enabling (de la Chaux and Haugh, 2020; Williams et al., 2022) without considering their dynamic, contextual nature. While Refai et al. (2025) argue that entrepreneurship scholarship has been limited by dichotomies that position entrepreneurs as either heroic agents or passive recipients, this study extends this critique to the notion of institutional voids, thus showing how timing, demographic composition, and regulatory sequencing determine whether constraints enable or limit agency.

In sum, this RQ illustrates that CICs shape refugee agency through the dynamic interplay between temporal, spatial, and regulatory factors that work simultaneously. Specifically, these contexts create temporal windows that interact with spatial configurations to either amplify or fragment collective responses, while regulatory mechanisms then channel these responses toward different expressions of agency. The specific configuration of these dimensions, determine whether CICs produce transformative or reproductive outcomes, thus extending beyond existing theoretical frameworks that treat constraints as uniformly enabling or limiting.

7.1.1. Temporal-Institutional Dynamics

The comparison between Zaatari and Azraq illustrates how the timing and sequence of institutional development appears to have shaped the scope for refugee agency. This temporal dimension addresses a pertinent gap in existing literature, which treats the notion of institutional voids as static phenomena rather than dynamic, time-sensitive voids that appear to open and close at the discretion of the institutional structure. For instance, Zaatari's emergence in 2012 following the advent of the Syrian civil war created conditions that led to institutional voids in the pilot camp, whereby gaps in formal regulatory frameworks inadvertently enabled autonomous refugee action. The UN participant acknowledged that the UNHCR were focused

on providing immediate shelter without capacity to organise commercial structures during the crisis period, enabling refugees to create their own marketplace. This temporal misalignment within the humanitarian stakeholder mix, ultimately led to structural openings that refugee entrepreneurs exploited in Zaatari.

The temporal dynamics observed between camps exemplify what extant research conceptualises as the paradox of embedded agency (Kholeif and Jack, 2018; Lok and Willmott, 2019). Thus, Zaatari's refugees, were observed to be deeply embedded within humanitarian dependency structures, thereby establishing alternative market governance owing to crisis-induced institutional gaps leading to temporal windows for opportunity spaces to surface. This paradox exhibits not through individual heroism, but through the synergy of temporal voids, collective capacity, and institutional distraction. Refai et al. (2025) argue that understanding this concept requires moving beyond viewing entrepreneurs as either 'captives of institutional constraints' or capable agents, instead examining how they decipher resources and opportunities to attain upward social mobility. This study therefore provides valuable insights into how timing determines whether such contemplation can translate into structural transformation (i.e. Zaatari) or remain confined to adaptation within existing frameworks (i.e. Azraq).

These findings extend de la Chaux and Haugh's (2020) analysis of how RCEs exploit institutional misalignment in refugee camp settings in Kenya by accentuating the importance of timing. While their study identifies mechanisms of bricolage, such as eroding formal institutions and recombining formal/informal arrangements, the current study shows that the sequence of institutional development appears to determine which strategies become feasible. Furthermore, the concept of inception and temporality further shows how the notion of institutional distraction during crisis periods enables refugee agency to flourish before formal control mechanisms can be implemented. This institutional void allowed refugees to shape their commercial environment organically, establishing market structures before formal oversight could be implemented. Retrospective attempts at institutional control proved ineffective once refugee-created market structures had become established. This therefore implies that institutional voids function as enabling spaces only when temporal emergence (i.e. crisis-induced gaps), structural conditions (i.e. institutional distraction), and agent capabilities (i.e. collective agency potential) align, thereby leading to transformative outcomes.

This temporal pattern, however, challenges Khanna and Palepu's (1997) characterisation of institutional voids as inherently constraining, showing a more nuanced relationship between voids and entrepreneurial agency that is dependent on temporal configurations. The current findings demonstrate that voids create windows of opportunity whose enabling or constraining effects depend on timing relative to agent and institutional capacity. This temporal contingency fundamentally reframes institutional void scholarship. Zaatari's initial void period enabled transformative agency because refugees established alternative structures (i.e. shadow institutions) before formal institutions could be developed, thus directly contradicting assumptions that voids uniformly constrain entrepreneurship.

Conversely, Azraq's pre-planned development demonstrates the constraining effects of temporal control. The camp's inception two years after Zaatari enabled institutional learning and correction, with comprehensive planning eliminating the temporal gaps that had enabled Zaatari's autonomous development. The UN implemented extensive structural re-organisation including physical infrastructure, residential mapping, and pre-designed market spaces. Specifically, the delayed implementation of market spaces in Azraq, demonstrates how temporal control constrains refugee agency by maintaining dependency on institutional supply channels (e.g. shopping mall) during critical early settlement periods when entrepreneurial foundations are typically established. This finding suggests institutional void theory requires a temporal caveat. Voids constrain when institutional actors maintain control over their timing and closure, but enable when crisis conditions create temporal misalignments between institutional capacity and entrepreneurial initiative.

These temporal dynamics are further illustrated by marketplace development within each camp. Zaatari's market emerged immediately and organically, with refugees adapting residential units for commercial use through physical modifications that converted shelter into commercial infrastructure. This rapid spatial transformation exemplifies how temporal windows (brief periods where institutional oversight capacity lags behind entrepreneurial initiative), enable creative agency that extends beyond the bricolage strategies typically documented within CICs (de la Chaux and Haugh, 2020; Heilbrunn, 2019; Mair and Marti, 2009).

Existing scholarship recognises how entrepreneurs in resource-scarce environments engage in bricolage, thus making do with available materials and recombining resources creatively

(Baker and Nelson, 2005; de la Chaux and Haugh, 2020). However, Zaatari's case shows such creative responses require not only material resourcefulness but also temporal space free from institutional constraint. Accordingly, when institutional voids coincide with crisis-induced temporal windows, entrepreneurs can establish economic structures that become difficult for authorities to disassemble or regulate, leading to the formation of refugee-created shadow institutions.

This study shows that Zaatari's refugees exceeded prior literature's focus on institutional misalignment exploitation by developing alternative governance structures that facilitated entrepreneurial activity. In juxtaposition, Azraq's controlled timeline prevented such adaptive responses, thereby channelling entrepreneurial activity through predetermined institutional frameworks that evidently negated the type of organic development seen in Zaatari. These finding highlights how contemporary entrepreneurship agency frameworks like AMOIP (McMullen et al., 2021) and CAMO (Romme and Dimov, 2021) prove potentially insufficient for CICs, as their assumptions of stable institutional environments cannot seemingly capture how temporal dynamics can shape structure-agency relationships.

Overall, these temporal-institutional dynamics show that constrained contexts do not uniformly constrain agency but instead create unique temporal windows for action. Thus, early institutional voids appear to enable transformative agency in this study, while pre-planned institutional presence in the case of Azraq appeared to funnel agency toward reproductive patterns. The timing of institutional intervention therefore becomes a key determinant of whether constraints enable or limit refugee entrepreneurial autonomy, adding a temporal dimension that remains under-theorised.

7.1.2. Spatial-Demographic Configurations

The spatial and demographic arrangements within camps appeared to fundamentally shape the collective dimensions of refugee agency, thereby determining whether individual urges could lead to collective action or remain fragmented and dependent. The contrast between Zaatari's concentrated homogeneity (i.e. Daraa) and Azraq's dispersed heterogeneity (i.e. Syrians and Jordanians) for example clearly shows how demographic composition intersects with spatial design to either amplify or fragment refugee agency in ways not adequately captured by existing social capital theory. Zaatari's demographic homogeneity enabled collective agency

through mechanisms not fully explained in existing scholarship. While scholarship recognises how collective agency intensifies around shared ethnic networks and dispositions driving sustained entrepreneurial action (Itani et al., 2025; Klyver and McMullen, 2025), this study illustrates how spatial concentration of homogeneous populations creates the structural conditions enabling such collective capacity to surface. Thus, Zaatari's Daraa concentration enabled the mobilisation of pre-existing social capital for institutional transformation, thus signifying how agents' capacity to draw upon shared structural resources (i.e. rules and resources embedded in Daraa's social networks) enabled transformative agency.

In contrast, Azraq's heterogeneity fragmented access to such shared structural properties, constraining refugees to reproductive agency focused on isolated individual adaptation rather than collective institutional change. This demonstrates how the same formal camp structures produce divergent agentic outcomes depending on refugees' position-practice relations and their differential access to resources from pre-displacement contexts. While diverse social networks may enhance entrepreneurship propensity in institutionally supportive environments, this study suggests that homogeneous networks provide superior capacity for the recursive interaction between external and internal structures necessary for institutional transformation (McMullen et al., 2021). In Zaatari specifically, homogeneous Daraa networks enabled synergistic recursion of shared internal structures (i.e. Daraa norms, authority patterns) institutionalised as external collective structures, with each business reinforcing Daraa-based trading norms that sustained ventures. Conversely, Azraq's heterogeneity fractured this recursive cycle, whereby internal structures could not coalesce into shared external institutional forms, thus leaving camp structures externally imposed rather than internally co-produced like in the case of Zaatari. Furthermore, Zaatari's spatial concentration of homogeneous populations confirms the amplification effects predicted by ethnic enclave theory (Villares-Varela et al., 2020), while extending it to show how demographic homogeneity functions distinctively in refugee camp contexts versus migrant entrepreneurship in stable institutional settings. With 96% of Zaatari's entrepreneurs originating from Daraa, the camp effectively transplanted existing social networks and entrepreneurial practices into the refugee context. This demographic concentration facilitated collective agency through what could be described as a streamlined re-embedding process (Harima, 2022). Zaatari's blank canvas context created fertile ground for informal activity governed by transplanted Daraa norms. Extended family networks from the same region established trust and cooperation, rather than competition, as

the foundation of business interactions, thereby enabling Zaatari's refugees to leverage pre-existing social capital.

This finding contradicts Klaesson and Öner's (2020) study, which found residential segregation insignificant to entrepreneurship outcomes among European economic migrants. This study suggests demographic homogeneity functions as an external structural condition with both external and internal implications. Externally, it enables coordination-intensive institutional forms; and internally, it shapes refugees' interpretive schemes around trust, cooperation, and collective capacity. This homogeneous composition, combined with spatial organisational freedom, enabled collective agency that transformed institutional arrangements. Economic concentration further amplified this dynamic, as organic market development created a centralised commercial hub along Market Street 1, colloquially termed the 'Champs-Élysées.

The spatial clustering of businesses along Zaatari's market streets boosted customer flow leading to multiplier effects, forming a conducive ecosystem where refugee entrepreneurs appeared to benefit from increased visibility and accessibility. Furthermore, the linear market street architecture enabled integrated commercial networks that reinforced collective entrepreneurial identity. In SST terms, this spatial structure clearly shaped position-practice relations (Stones, 2005), such as the notion of physical proximity leading to routine interactions that developed shared interpretive schemes about collective capacity. This represents a structuration outcome where external structures (i.e. market architecture) and agent reflexivity (i.e. strategic thinking/responses) mutually constituted collective agency, extending beyond the social capital mobilisation documented by Abushaikha et al.'s (2021) observations of Zaatari's bustling market streets. While Abushaikha et al. identify how social capital operates within predetermined arrangements through bonding, bridging, and linking dimensions, their analysis fails to explain how entrepreneurial action might transform these very structures. The findings from this study support the notion that demographic homogeneity creates qualitatively different forms of collective agency that enable institutional transformation instead of simply reproducing existing social arrangements within camp constraints.

The divergent role of demographic composition in this study illustrates a critical structural condition absent from debates between constraining (Mair and Marti, 2009) and enabling (Williams et al., 2022) perspectives on institutional voids. Both perspectives assume entrepreneurial agency operates uniformly within void contexts, however these findings

demonstrate that population-level structural conditions determine whether identical institutional structures produce enabling or constraining outcomes. Zaatari's homogeneity transformed regulatory void into enabling condition through the duality of structure, while Azraq's heterogeneity converted the same void into a constraint. This suggests the debate requires reframing, whether voids enable or constrain in part depends on demographic structure, which shapes agents' interpretive schemes and capacity for collective action. Furthermore, the mandated co-ownership model in Azraq created systemic power imbalances through asymmetric position-practice relations. For example, Jordanian co-owners possessed legal residency, mobility, and established supply networks, while refugee co-owners faced movement restrictions and procurement dependence. This structural asymmetry shaped domination relations where Jordanian partners controlled key resources such as licensing, supplier access, capital, thereby leading to the constraint of refugee autonomy.

This illustrates Stones' (2005) advancement beyond Giddens (1984) rendition of ST by accentuating the notion of positioned agents within power-laden structures. Where Zaatari's refugee-only ownership enabled horizontal position-practice relations and collective agency, Azraq's enforced vertical relations embedded refugees in subordinate positions. The regulatory framework thus institutionalised hierarchical power relations that fragmented collective agency, demonstrating how state interventions can systematically distribute agential capacity unequally and prevent the social embeddedness that enables entrepreneurial agency (Villares-Varela et al., 2022) in contexts with legal autonomy.

Fundamentally, these spatial-demographic configurations demonstrate that demographic composition and physical architecture operate as structural preconditions determining whether institutional voids enable or constrain refugee agency. In sum, homogeneous, spatially concentrated populations enable collective agency capable of transforming institutional arrangements during early formation periods, while heterogeneous, spatially fragmented populations shoehorn agency toward individual adaptation within existing structural constraints.

7.1.3. Regulatory Mechanisms

The regulatory and governance frameworks within the Syrian refugee camps in Jordan appeared to create divergent pathways for entrepreneurial expression, thereby channelling

agency toward either autonomous self-determination or institutional dependency. The contrast between Zaatari's minimal formal regulation and Azraq's overzealous control systems clearly demonstrated how regulatory approaches shape the character and scope of refugee entrepreneurial agency in ways that challenge existing assumptions about institutional governance. For instance, the surfacing of shadow institutions in Zaatari represents a phenomenon largely absent from existing RE scholarship. While sharing similarities with the defiant practices identified by Al-Dajani et al. (2019) among refugee women entrepreneurs in Jordan's urban areas, camp-based shadow institutions appeared to operate as comprehensive alternative governance systems shaped predominantly by male gatekeepers and informal gang structures that regulated market territories and resource distribution. This finding extends beyond Heilbrunn's (2019) conceptualisation of institutional voids as simply enabling bricolage strategies to illustrate how refugees create systematic governance alternatives.

Overall, the regulatory chaos in Zaatari, while problematic for aid coordination, inadvertently enabled refugee entrepreneurs to establish autonomous business practices without prohibitive formal requirements. The absence of restrictive commercial regulations enabled subentrepreneurial practices, entrepreneurship operating outside formal institutional frameworks to escape constraining contexts (Refai and McElwee, 2023). Refugees modified residential units into commercial spaces, established informal credit systems, and developed supply networks beyond institutional control. This regulatory void functioned analogous to a 'liquid cage' (Refai and McElwee, 2023 p.1041), where refugees operated with sufficient visibility to maintain legal status while remaining elusive enough to avoid reprimand. Moreover, the camp's proximity to the Syrian border coupled with its porous borders further enabled subentrepreneurship activities that connected camp businesses to external markets, creating multiplier effects through diversified supply chains that effectively functioned as informal export-import operations.

Essentially, this led to the emergence of shadow institutions, defined as informal yet structured systems that appeared to fill the governance voids while maintaining refugee autonomy. This informal structure included informal credit systems, community-based dispute resolution, and self-organised supply chains that operated parallel to formal humanitarian structures. These systems encompassed various illicit but economically rational activities, as documented by earlier scholarship on Zaatari's informal supply networks (Abushaikha et al., 2021). While these systems sometimes included problematic elements like territorial control by informal

groups, they fundamentally enabled refugee economic autonomy and collective self-determination by creating alternative governance mechanisms when formal systems proved wanting.

Williams et al.'s (2022) research on forced migrants who deliberately evade government-connected formal networks due to corruption concerns demonstrates how institutional distrust drives informal entrepreneurial activity. However, their focus on individual strategic choices overlooks the systematic institutional alternatives, in this case the role of shadow institutions and parallel governance. While Williams et al. examined transnational entrepreneurs crossing national borders, Zaatari exhibited analogous trans-camp entrepreneurship whereby refugees established supply chains connecting the camp's internal economy to external Jordanian cities, selling goods purchased on e-cards in exchange for cash, thereby circumventing UNHCR distribution systems. This operated through similar mechanisms as transnational entrepreneurship such as exploiting regulatory differences between camp and external governance, leveraging cross-boundary networks, and maintaining partial visibility to avoid sanction.

In comparison to Zaatari's shadow institutions and associated networks, Azraq's comprehensive regulatory framework deliberately shoehorned refugee agency toward institutional dependency through multiple control mechanisms. Fortified perimeters and controlled access points prevented the informal border crossings that characterised Zaatari. Essentially, the camp operated highly regulated supply chains requiring formal permits for all commercial activities, whereby refugees needed authorisation to leave camp boundaries and source goods from nearby Jordanian towns and city. This regulatory oversight effectively prevented the informal supply networks that typified Zaatari. Beyond these augmented supply chains, Azraq's regulatory framework clearly disrupted refugees' capacity to reconstruct familiar entrepreneurial structures.

Where Poblete et al.'s (2023) Venezuelan migrants in Chile could selectively reconstruct familiar business practices from their home context, Azraq's co-ownership model-imposed 'foreign' structural arrangements. The mandated Jordanian partnerships essentially forced refugees into subordinate roles different from their pre-displacement Syrian entrepreneurial experiences. This prevented the reconstructive agency Wainwright and Muñoz (2025) identify

as being essential to the ability to recreate known structural patterns that facilitate entrepreneurial identity maintenance in incarcerated settings.

The presence or absence of centralised commercial infrastructure also shaped entrepreneurial resource mobilisation differently across camps. Zaatari's lack of centralised retail options created institutional voids enabling autonomous resource accumulation. Without formal shopping infrastructure, refugees established market dominance without competing against subsidised institutional vendors. Conversely, Azraq's centralised mall system again channelled refugee agency through institutional frameworks by creating controlled commercial environments competing directly with refugee businesses. For instance, the mall's subsidised pricing undercut many refugee's business operations, forcing adaptation within constrained parameters. The digital wallet system compounded these constraints by preventing cash transfers between wallets, aid designated for specific purposes could not be repurposed for entrepreneurial investment, maintaining refugee dependency on institutional allocation decisions and contrasting sharply with Zaatari's informal cash economies further aided by their smuggling loopholes.

In summary, these regulatory frameworks demonstrate that constrained contexts channel refugee agency along predetermined pathways that existing institutional theory inadequately explains. In the case of Zaatari, minimal regulation with governance gaps enables autonomous agency and innovative responses to constraints, while in the case of Azraq, comprehensive regulation channelled agency toward dependency and reproduction of existing power structures. Regulatory design therefore determines whether RE develops as autonomous collective action or subordinate individual adaptation, thus demonstrating that institutional architecture fundamentally shapes entrepreneurial agency in CICs.

7.1.4. The Enabling-Constraining Spectrum

This study posits that CICs exist along an enabling-constraining spectrum rather than as binary categories that merely limit or permit refugee agency. This conceptualisation refines the debate between scholars who view institutional voids as constraining (Mair and Marti, 2009; Manolova et al., 2008) versus those who hold the enabling thesis (de la Chaux and Haugh, 2020; Kimjeon and Davidsson, 2022; Tracey et al., 2011). Rather than treating contextual features as either-or, this study demonstrates that the same structural factors can function as

enablers or constraints depending on their configuration, implementation and agent capacity. This extends Kimjeon and Davidsson's (2022) framework of partial external enablement by positing that enabling and constraining forces coexist within the same contextual features, with their prominence determined by the interplay between institutional arrangements and entrepreneurial agency.

The spectrum also supports the notion of the "dark side" of socio-spatial contexts (Welter, 2011, p. 171), though the findings challenge how these constraints surface. Spatial proximity, while facilitating networks, can contribute to over-embeddedness through control mechanisms and closed networks (Welter, 2011). Yet in the case of Zaatari, dense network conditions created by spatial proximity enabled transformative collective agency thus not quite affirming the associated limitation of over-embeddedness. While territorial control by dominant networks created hierarchical embeddedness, entrepreneurs across positions retained capacity for innovation and mobilisation. Conversely, in Azraq, spatial dispersion created sparse networks that manifested as both under-embeddedness (i.e. those excluded) and over-embeddedness (i.e. those dependent), thereby generating the rigid dependencies associated with proximity through fragmentation.

The spectrum effect thus emerges through temporal, spatial-demographic, and regulatory mechanisms that create or close spaces for agency. Zaatari epitomises the enabling end, where institutional gaps, demographic homogeneity, and minimal control enabled individual impulses to aggregate into collective transformation. Azraq characterises the constraining end, where pre-planned institutions, demographic fragmentation, and extensive control channelled adaptation within existing constraints. These patterns operate through path-dependent processes: Zaatari's early gaps enabled shadow institutions reinforcing autonomy, while Azraq's early controls created dependencies reinforcing oversight. The temporal sequencing, demographic composition, and regulatory approach collectively determine whether constraints facilitate or inhibit transformation.

These findings carry important policy implications, yet require avoiding the assumption that entrepreneurship alone can address economic difficulties without addressing structural barriers (Betts et al., 2017). Zaatari's success arose not from individual resourcefulness but from temporal-institutional alignments creating spaces for collective action. Policy interventions must therefore ensure spatial-institutional conditions providing multiple routes to resources,

not simply facilitate network formation or develop individual capabilities. Interventions focused exclusively on micro-level activities risk an epistemological fallacy by emphasising individual agency when outcomes are determined by macro-level contextual dynamics such as the aforesaid (Korsgaard et al., 2025).

7.2. DO REFUGEE ENTREPRENEURS PRESERVE, MODIFY, OR CHALLENGE EXISTING STRUCTURES, AND HOW?

This research question extends current entrepreneurship theory by demonstrating that transformation is multifactorial as opposed to being binary, occurring along internal (human) and external (social) structural dimensions that can operate simultaneously or independently. This dual spectrum posits that refugee entrepreneurs can achieve varying degrees of transformation depending on how their collective capacity interacts with their contextual conditions, where enabling conditions (i.e. institutional voids, shadow institutions – Zaatari) or constraining conditions (i.e. corrective mechanisms, design structures – Azraq) for example can create markedly different opportunity spaces. This research therefore illustrates that refugee entrepreneurs actively engage with these structural forces along a dynamic continuum rather than simply experiencing binary outcomes of success or failure. Thus, entrepreneurial responses range from transformative actions that capitalise on nascent institutional structures (Zaatari) to reproductive actions that evidently maintain the status quo (Azraq).

This theoretical positing addresses critical gaps identified in extant literature. Recent scholarship asserts that entrepreneurship research has been plagued by persistent dichotomies between agent-centric and structure-centric perspectives (Abebe, 2023; Lang et al., 2024), thereby failing to capture the recursive interplay through which contexts are produced and reproduced by entrepreneurial action. This fragmentation is particularly pertinent in RE scholarship, where frameworks focus either on structural constraints or individual agency without adequately addressing their dynamic interaction (Lang et al., 2024). Furthermore, other RE literature concludes that current scholarship appears preoccupied with human or refugee characteristics rather than agentic processes (Abebe, 2023). This occurs notwithstanding the geographic bias toward Global North cases (Heilbrunn and Iannone, 2020), in spite of the overwhelming majority of refugees residing in developing countries.

In sum, the dual/partial transformation framing addresses these limitations by providing what Abebe (2023) identifies as lacking in extant RE research: a process-based framework that extends SST to explain why similarly constrained contexts produce divergent degrees of transformation. The following two subsections examine this framework empirically, first conceptualising dual transformation in Zaatari where refugee entrepreneurs achieved both internal and external change, then contrasting this with partial transformation in Azraq where change remained limited to internal/human-level dimensions.

7.2.1. Dual Transformation in Zaatari: Internal & External Change

The case of Zaatari exemplifies the aggregate theme of dual transformation, where refugee entrepreneurs achieved changes to both internal identities and their external structural environment. This dual transformation surfaced from a dynamic institutional system where institutional voids create opportunity spaces that refugee entrepreneurs fill through shadow institutions: informal power structures that address gaps in formal regulation. Collective agency serves as the central engine that connects and activates these institutional elements, thus enabling refugee entrepreneurs to not only navigate their respective constraints but actively reshape both their internal capabilities and external structural conditions through continuous feedback loops. Figure 53 conceptualises this interconnected process in relation to Zaatari.

7.2.1.1. Internal/Human Level

Conduct analysis in Zaatari shows that internal transformation became apparent through comprehensive entrepreneurial pivots that effectively altered refugees' occupational identities within its enabling environment. For instance, over 80% of Zaatari entrepreneurs underwent complete career transitions, representing identity transformation rather than mere occupational adaptation. Crucially, these pivots were facilitated by collective agency operating through shadow institutions that provided the informal support structures necessary for such identity shifts to occur. Overall, the analysis demonstrated pivots across three dominant trajectories: employment-to-self-employment transitions, rural-to-urban entrepreneurship adaptations, and education-to-entrepreneurship shifts.

The employment-to-self-employment pivot, driven by autonomy preservation, illustrated how collective agency enabled profound shifts in refugees' internal structures. Entrepreneurs

reconstructed their dispositional frames around self-employment as freedom from subordination and job insecurity, with one entrepreneur characterising employment as enslavement that prevents wealth accumulation and creates constant fear of dismissal. This internal transformation was reinforced by both pre-displacement cultural schemas, merchants from Daraa accustomed to autonomous trading practices, and Zaatari's collective institutional environment that made such autonomy materially possible.

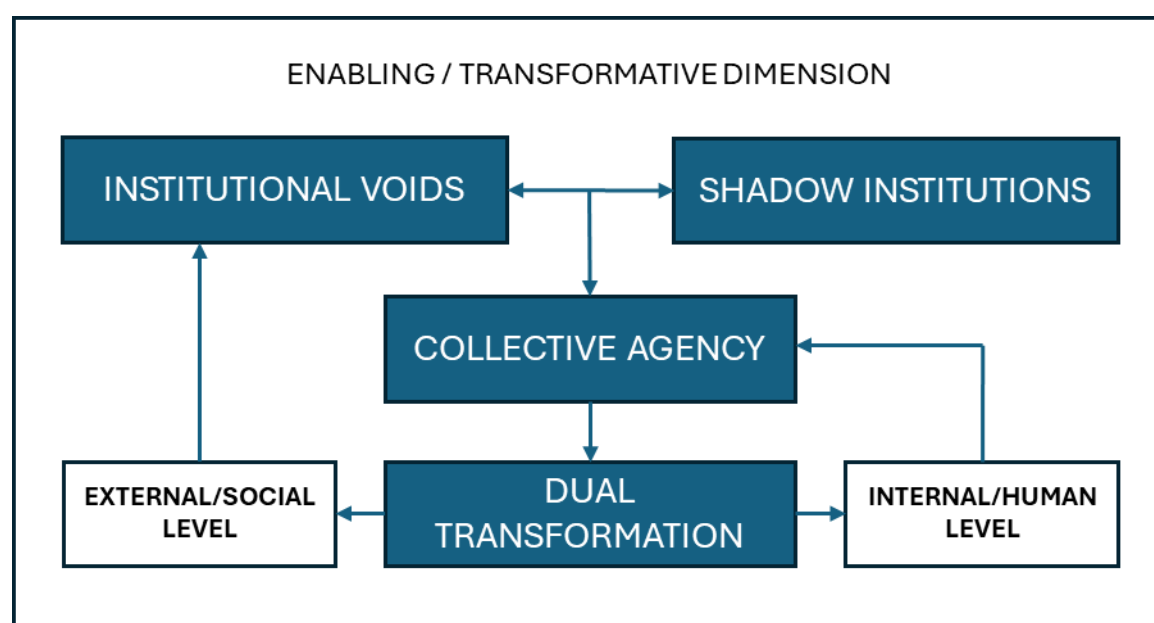


Figure 53: Dual transformation in Zaatari: internal & external change

The rural-to-urban entrepreneurship example demonstrated how refugees redeployed pre-displacement knowledge structures within radically different terrains. Entrepreneurs who had been farmers or livestock herders in rural Syria leveraged their agricultural understanding to establish food-based businesses within the camp's urban-like environment. Former farmers who had cultivated their own land transitioned to operating bakeries when agricultural opportunities became impossible, thereby demonstrating not just occupational change but a reconfiguration of how existing knowledge structures could be applied within harsh, concrete structures.

Regarding the education-to-entrepreneurship pattern, this theme illustrated how displacement for many young adults could lead to entrepreneurial motivation through reconstruction of

internal structures supported by collective agency. Young refugees developed new dispositional frames centred on economic agency through their participation in shadow institutional networks (e.g. smuggling), with camp life teaching responsibility and the capacity to confront challenges from early ages. Their engagement with informal entrepreneurial structures enabled the formation of internal capabilities oriented toward economic autonomy in the present rather than formal educational pathways which seemed surplus to camp living.

A key element enabling dual transformation in Zaatari was transformative nostalgia, the translation of memories into entrepreneurial motivation through collective support systems. Refugees acknowledged persistent trauma yet converted these precarious experiences into productive agency through collective mechanisms. This finding extends Klyver et al.'s (2022) work on RE in crisis contexts. While they identify crisis self-efficacy as the most significant psychological factor explaining entrepreneurship take up in host nations, the case of Zaatari demonstrates how institutional configurations enabled refugees to develop this efficacy collectively. The key difference is how shadow institutional networks provided collective material resources and social legitimacy that transformed individual crisis-coping into shared entrepreneurial agency capable of altering external institutional structures. Unlike individual-level factors in developed host nation contexts like Denmark (Klyver et al., 2022), Zaatari's collective agency operated through informal networks that reconstructed refugees' dispositional frames around economic autonomy while challenging formal governance systems. Thus, the case of Zaatari epitomises how traumatic experiences can produce favourable entrepreneurial outcomes when refugees are able to capitalise on enabling conditions that support both cognitive reframing and collective agency development.

7.2.1.2. External/Social Level

Concerning the notion of external transformation, this arose through the concept of collective agency, leveraged by demographic homogeneity to amplify individual changes into structural modifications. Zaatari's demographic concentration: 80% of camp inhabitants and 96% of entrepreneurs originating from Daraa province, enabled the re-embedding of shared entrepreneurial cultures within the camp environment. Consequently, this homogeneity facilitated coordinated familial responses that surpassed individual adaptation, thereby allowing Daraa's dominant commercial traditions to shape Zaatari's ecosystem. These family

and regional connections created business clusters coordinating structural modifications through shared cultural practices and mutual support systems.

The enabling conditions for this collective agency to form occurred from specific contextual factors identified in the camp's formation. Unlike Azraq's pre-planned development, Zaatari's organic emergence during the crisis created institutional voids that refugees could exploit. As documented, the UNHCR's primary focus was on basic shelter needs, ultimately leading to regulatory and commercial frameworks being underdeveloped. This institutional distraction provided the window of opportunity for cunning refugees to exploit and establish autonomous economic structures before formal control mechanisms could be implemented. Furthermore, the demographic concentration from Daraa proved significant because these refugees shared not only cultural frameworks but also pre-existing commercial knowledge and social capital, enabling rapid coordination in exploiting institutional voids. This shared foundation allowed entrepreneurs to leverage collective agency for both business survival and challenging UNHCR's formalisation attempts thereby asserting community autonomy over camp life.

Crucially, shadow institutions, subsequently provided the enabling conditions through which collective agency could embed and flourish in Zaatari. The demographic homogeneity proved essential in establishing these shadow institutions, as shared cultural understandings of authority, trust, and reciprocity facilitated the development of parallel governance structures. The concentrated networks further enabled entrepreneurs to create alternative financing mechanisms, community-based dispute resolution systems, and self-organised supply chains that appeared to operate outside of formal governance procedures.

The use of a comparative case study design helps address a critical gap in understanding how demographic composition shapes the substitutive arrangements that surface when actors confront institutional voids. While scholarship recognises that informal networks serve as substitutes for formal institutions (de la Chaux and Haugh, 2020; Mair and Marti, 2009; Williams et al., 2022), these examples predominantly rely on single-case studies that cannot explain how varying demographic and structural configurations produce different operational outcomes across constrained contexts. By comparing Zaatari and Azraq, this study illuminates why some refugee communities develop substitutive structures while others do not. The critical role of shadow institutions here represents more than simple informal networks in this study. They constitute parallel governance mechanisms operating outside official frameworks,

alternative economic systems converting humanitarian aid into cash through coordinated e-card loopholes, and territorial control structures challenging formal camp management. Rather than debating whether institutional voids constrain or enable entrepreneurship, this study shows that demographic homogeneity along with a conducive environment both shape refugees' capacity to collectively construct shadow institutions that actively fill voids through coordinated alternatives operating parallel to formal structures

In sum, the notion of external transformation became evident by Zaatari's positioning as an urban city and the world's most entrepreneurial refugee camp as described by the UNHCR. Refugees physically reconstructed their environment through collective bricolage, converting residential units into commercial spaces and designing the camp's idiomatic *Champs-Élysées* market street through coordinated bottom-up development.

7.2.2. Partial Transformation in Azraq: Constrained Internal Adaptation

In Azraq, refugee entrepreneurs achieved some degree of internal adaptation, but unlike in Zaatari, they were systematically constrained from making external structural modifications due to Azraq's institutional makeup. The fragmentation of refugee agency appeared to channel entrepreneurship into reproductive rather than transformative patterns, resulting in only partial transformation. Despite these constraints, refugees demonstrated retained adaptive capacity through occupational transitions similar to their Zaatari counterparts. However, Azraq's enhanced institutional structures prevented these individual adaptations from translating into broader structural changes. Figure 54 conceptualises the notion of partial transformation within Azraq's ecosystem.

7.2.2.1. Internal/Individual-Level

Azraq exhibited partial/constrained transformation through subordinate occupational pivots rather than the autonomous entrepreneurship seen in the example of Zaatari. Despite similar entrepreneurial motivations in both camps, Azraq's institutional constraints seemingly directed refugees' internal changes into dependent employment relationships.

The institutional co-ownership model further subordinated refugee entrepreneurs to Jordanian business partners, preventing the autonomous identity development that typified Zaatari's

transformation. Rather than reconstructing dispositional frames around economic agency, Azraq's refugees remained dependent on external partnerships that reinforced their subordinate status. Where the case of Zaatari demonstrated transformative use of nostalgia, Azraq exhibited a more paralysing form wherein refugees acknowledged their precarious situation without converting it into collective agency. Entrepreneurs expressed resignation rather than mobilisation, stating they would rather remain in the camp than return under the regime, thus emphasising security over autonomy.

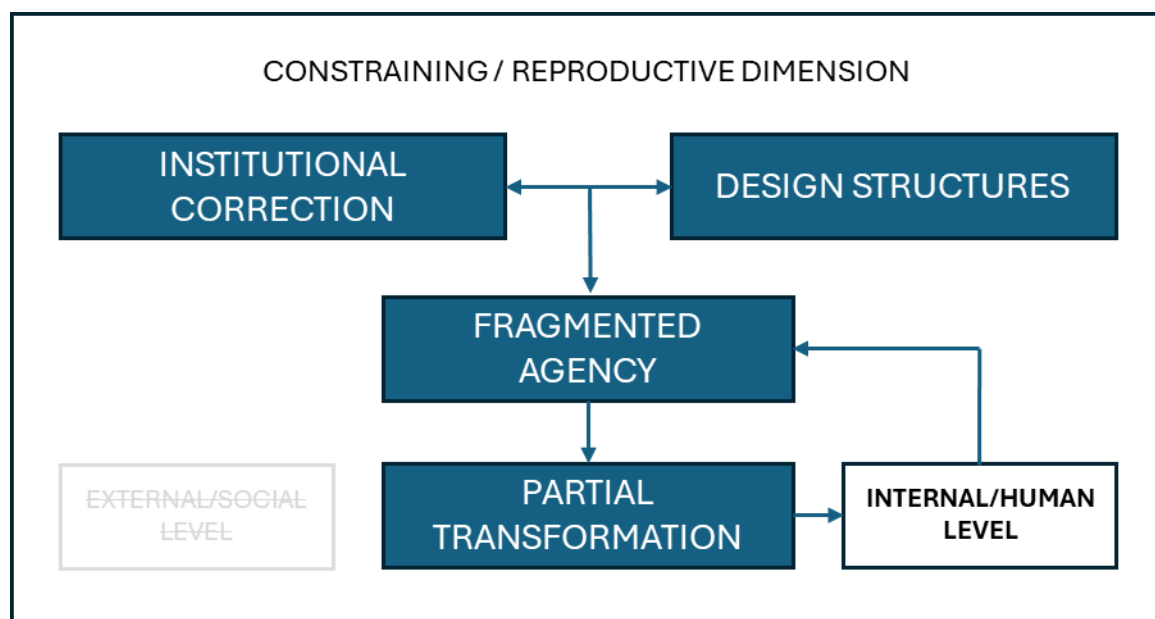


Figure 54: Partial transformation in Azraq: internal change exclusively

Unlike Zaatari's entrepreneurs who leveraged shared trauma to transform their camp environment, Azraq's fragmented demographic composition and harsh architecture prevented the collective reframing necessary to convert individual crisis-coping into coordinated entrepreneurial action capable of challenging external structures. This paralysis manifested not only in entrepreneurial outcomes but also in refugees' temporal orientation and identity reconstruction.

While indeterminate liminality describes a prolonged state where refugees oscillate between identities and contexts (Alkhaled and Sasaki, 2022), Azraq demonstrates how such liminality becomes paralysing rather than productive without collective agency. Literature on refugee

trauma shows how prolonged legal limbo, work prohibitions, and mobility restrictions prevent formal business establishment regardless of individual capabilities (Wauters and Lambrecht, 2008). Azraq affirms these constraints, as fragmented demographics reinforced passive acceptance rather than transformative mobilisation of similar experiences through collective action (e.g. Zaatari).

7.2.2.2. External/Social Level

Essentially, the prevention of external transformation in Azraq stemmed from a systematic reproductive cycle where institutional correction mechanisms and design structures created fragmented agency, which could only produce internal adaptations that reinforced the constraining system. Unlike Zaatari's demographic homogeneity and propensity for collective agency, Azraq's heterogeneous population coupled with the presence of Jordanian stakeholders appeared to fragment potential coordination, thereby trapping refugee responses within a seemingly closed reproductive loop that blocked any pathway to external transformation.

Institutional correction mechanisms, deliberate policy interventions designed to eliminate gaps in formal governance, implemented in Azraq systematically filled voids. This represents what institutional void literature identifies as institutional completeness versus institutional voidness creating fundamentally different opportunity structures (Mair et al., 2012). While Zaatari's emergency conditions created unintentional gaps where shadow institutions could emerge to fill regulatory voids through refugee agency, Azraq's design incorporated lessons learned from Zaatari specifically to prevent such autonomous development.

Beyond the notion of regulatory completeness, Azraq's spatial architecture, exemplified by dispersed village units and wide empty spaces between blocks, functioned as an external structural constraint. While relevant literature demonstrates how physical proximity in rural contexts enables entrepreneurship through social closeness and resource access (Elkafrawi et al., 2022), the case of Azraq demonstrates the inverse. Thus, intentional spatial dispersion became a constraining external structure in Azraq. Elkafrawi et al. (2022) note that SST has yet to fully posit how spatial design itself operates as external structure preventing the physical proximity necessary for collective agency formation. Azraq's case thus extends this observation by showing spatial architecture as deliberate institutional design, thereby functioning to fragment collective capacity and prevent shadow institution emergence.

The case of Azraq exemplifies the constraining thesis within institutional voids literature, that voids inhibit entrepreneurship (Mair and Marti, 2009), through comprehensive population management that controlled refugee mobility, centralised resource distribution preventing informal economic networks, and systematic elimination of coordination spaces. This resulted in what Webb et al. (2020) term concurrent voids being eliminated, leaving no gaps where alternative arrangements (i.e. shadow institutions) could develop. Spatial design structures further reinforced institutional correction by physically fragmenting potential collective coordination. Furthermore, the camp's organisation into four separate villages with individual markets eliminated the centralising effects that had amplified business activity in Zaatari. Refugees within both camps contrasted Zaatari's single centralised market, likened to a one-stop destination in the camp's centre, to Azraq's fragmented village system where customers struggled to locate specific shops. These architectural differences directly shaped entrepreneurial outcomes by either concentrating (Zaatari) or dispersing (Azraq) the customer base and flow necessary for viable and sustainable enterprise.

Overall, the combination of both institutional correction and design structures produced fragmented agency that posed major hindrances significantly reducing agents' ability to collectively transform their external environment. Market control mechanisms, particularly the mandated Jordanian co-ownership requirements, ensured that even entrepreneurial efforts remained ringfenced within existing power structures, with severely limited capacity to challenge or modify external arrangements. The result was a reproductive cycle where fragmented agency could only produce partial transformation confined entirely to the internal/human dimension. While individual refugees demonstrated resilience through skill development and family survival strategies, these internal adaptations paradoxically reinforced the constraining dimension by directing entrepreneurial agency away from collective action that might otherwise have challenged structural arrangements. This created what Figure 54 depicts as a self-perpetuating feedback loop whereby the mechanisms designed to constrain external transformation effectively reproduced themselves through the fragmented internal responses they generated. Within the enabling-constraining continuum, Azraq's institutional configuration shifted heavily toward constraint, though SST's ontological position suggests that structural transformation remains possible through accumulated agent actions over time. However, retroductive analysis of this case clearly shows that refugees in Azraq did not possess the transformative capacity to alter or transform their external structures.

7.2.3. *The Relationship between Refugee Entrepreneurship and Structural Change*

The cases of Zaatari and Azraq elucidate the dialectical relationship between RE and structural change, where outcomes evidently depend on the dynamic interaction between internal adaptive capacity and external enabling-constraining conditions. This framing elucidates why refugee cohorts facing comparable forced displacement circumstances, from the same country of origin and operating within the same national (host nation) regulatory framework produced fundamentally different entrepreneurial and structural outcomes. At its core, this theoretical significance lies in understanding transformation as multidimensional as opposed to being binary. Previous approaches classifying refugee responses as either pull or push (Zighan, 2021) miss the understanding that transformation can occur along different dimensions simultaneously, with internal human structure changes potentially disconnected from external social structure modifications as was the case with Azraq. Notably, three critical dimensions surfaced from this RQ: *homogeneous versus heterogeneous demographic composition*; *institutional voids versus institutional completeness*; and *shadow institutions as a bridging mechanism*.

7.2.3.1. *Demographic Composition*

Demographic composition proves to be central in determining collective coordination capacity, with homogeneity versus heterogeneity representing different conditions for entrepreneurial transformation. Zaatari's remarkable demographic concentration, with 80% of camp inhabitants and 96% of entrepreneurs originating from Daraa, evidently enabled the re-embedding of shared cultural practices, cooperative business relationships, and coordinated responses to institutional constraints. Zaatari's entrepreneurs could leverage existing reputational capital and established cooperation patterns, enabling the transformative nostalgia, that converted displacement trauma into entrepreneurial fuel as opposed to the constraining force typically identified in literature (Wauters and Lambrecht, 2008). Thus, the demographic concentration created powerful multiplier effects whereby individual internal transformation became amplified through collective action, further leading to external structural modifications.

In juxtaposition, Azraq's heterogeneous population drawn from diverse Syrian regions, further diluted by the presence of Jordanian proprietors, prevented such coordinative mechanisms from

surfacing. Rather than focusing on individual refugee characteristics as recent scholarship asserts (Abebe, 2023), this demographic fragmentation demonstrates how collective composition constrains the agentic processes necessary for institutional transformation. Without pre-existing social networks like those in Zaatari, Azraq's refugees encountered significant transaction costs when attempting to conduct business and establishing business relationships, relegating many to employee positions with limited bargaining power, restricted access to shop ownership opportunities, and exploitative working conditions that subordinated their agency to Jordanian proprietors. Accordingly, individual/internal adaptations remained isolated and fragmented, unable to translate into collective responses capable of challenging the status quo. This fragmentation points to a critical dimension of constrained agency, in that extreme institutional control reconfigures the nature of agency itself, from a potential structure-modifying force (Zaatari) into dispersed and atomised lone working (Azraq) that paradoxically stabilise the very constraints that necessitate them. Thus, in refugee camp settings, agency itself can become self-limiting.

7.2.3.2. Institutional Voids versus Completeness

Zaatari's unintentional voids, resulting from emergency conditions and overwhelming administrative capacity, subsequently created spaces where shadow institutions could arise through refugee agency. These voids enabled collective coordination and autonomous development, as refugees filled regulatory vacuums with informal systems of governance, dispute resolution, and economic organisation, what Williams et al. (2022) previously identified as informal institutional substitutes.

Critically, these shadow institutions functioned as stents, actively maintaining regulatory openings rather than closing them. This addresses the gap identified by de la Chaux and Haugh (2020) in their study of RCE, where they noted that while informal networks serve critical functions, the mechanisms through which refugees navigate institutional gaps remain under-theorised. The absence of comprehensive institutional control allowed entrepreneurial activities to flourish outside formal frameworks, with Zaatari's refugees establishing supply chains and business practices that operated independently of official camp policies. This institutional weakness paradoxically created strength, as ungoverned spaces became sites of entrepreneurial innovation where refugees could reshape the camp's commercial landscape through collective and unchallenged action. By maintaining institutional incompleteness, the

notion of shadow structures thus supports the enabling thesis of institutional voids, thereby exemplifying that structural absence can generate entrepreneurial possibility when informal power structures preserve the spaces where formal authority fails to reach.

Conversely, Azraq's comprehensive institutional design evidently eliminated the conditions that enabled Zaatari's entrepreneurial transformation. Learning from Zaatari's informal economy, administrators designed Azraq with complete formal coverage purposefully, as exemplified by the centralised resource distribution, inter-village blockades, regulated market control, and mandatory Jordanian co-ownership requirements. Furthermore, the external structural configuration through purpose-built spatial design, with designated commercial zones, limited business licenses, and controlled supply chains invariably left no regulatory gaps where shadow institutions could arise and operate as stents, unlike in Zaatari. In essence, this excessive institutional coverage constrained entrepreneurial agency by eliminating the very incompleteness through which refugees exercise transformative capacity. In summary, Azraq demonstrates the opposite: comprehensive institutional coverage can constrain entrepreneurial possibility when it reduces the spaces where informal institutional development can occur.

7.2.3.3. Shadow Institutions as a Bridging Mechanism

Beyond this notion of maintaining institutional voids, the role of shadow institutions further functioned as conduits through which individual entrepreneurial agency could aggregate into collective transformative capacity. In the case of Zaatari, shadow institutions converted isolated individual adaptations into coordinated collective action through informal governance systems, alternative economic networks, and parallel service delivery mechanisms. These shadow institutions enabled distributed agency (Garud and Karnøe, 2003) via institutional bridging (Louise and Jiang, 2018), whereby entrepreneurial outcomes surface not from individual acts of ingenuity but from the aggregate feats, relationships and interactions between active agents.

This aggregation process exhibited temporal dimensions that align with Omorede and Axelsson's (2018) identification of strategic progression in RE. In Zaatari, the evolution of shadow institutions reflected movement through distinct phases, such as initial opportunity 'scanning' as refugees (i.e. gate-keeper gangs) identified commercial possibilities within the camp's spatial layout such as porous borders; subsequent 'network activation' as informal governance structures coordinated these individual opportunities into collective market

arrangements via smuggling networks; and ultimately institutional bridging whereby these shadow structures interfaced with formal humanitarian systems. This progression illustrates how agency operates as what Refai et al. (2025) conceptualise as 'temporally constructed engagement by actors of different structural environments', wherein refugees' entrepreneurial capacity evolved through iterative engagement with both the institutional void and the emergent shadow structures filling it (p. 461). While Omorede and Axelsson (2018) observed these strategic phases primarily within individual venture creation, Zaatari's shadow institutions demonstrated how these temporal dimensions could operate at the collective level. The informal coordination that produced market street architecture for example represented not merely individual entrepreneurs progressing through these stages, but instead a collective bridging mechanism wherein the entrepreneurial community systematically scanned spatial opportunities, activated distributed networks, and ultimately bridged informal economic systems to formal camp geography.

In sum, the example of distributed agency manifested through pseudo-architectural capacity: the informal coordination that transformed entrepreneurial activity into structured market geography made evident by the DIY market street architecture. Through shadow governance, refugees collectively designed and designated market streets, allocated commercial spaces, and established informal zoning practices. Essentially, this guided dozens of individual entrepreneurs into a coordinated marketplace, unlike the scenario in Azraq whereby official distribution systems became operationalised.

This collective bridging aligns with Louise and Jiang's (2018) proposition that entrepreneurship can facilitate sociocultural, economic, and psychological dimensions of integration. However, Zaatari's shadow institutions extended this bridging capacity beyond integration into host societies, they instead bridged refugees to each other and to alternative institutional arrangements within the camp itself. The market streets became platforms not just for connecting to communities outside the camp, but for constructing economic communities within it, thereby demonstrating that bridging mechanisms operate not only between displaced and host populations but also within displaced communities themselves as they construct parallel institutional frameworks.

Thus, the refugee-inspired spatial restructuring initiative in Zaatari epitomises the collective capacity that Dey (2016) observed in Argentine crisis contexts, where rejection of institutional

mandates coupled with collective desire for economic agency generated entrepreneurial transformation through coordinated action. However, unlike Argentina's formal enterprise movements, Zaatari's transformation occurred through distributed spatial practices without the official architectural credentials, thus demonstrating how collective agency operates not only through organisational structures but through the concept of physical reconfiguration albeit through informal procedures.

Azraq's institutional completeness on the other hand thereby prevented this aggregation mechanism. Accordingly, individual entrepreneurial adaptations remained isolated because no equivalent informal structure appeared to exist in Azraq to guide individual agency into collective power. The comprehensive formal systems left no space for the opportunity scanning phase that Omorede and Axelsson (2018) described, as formal distribution channels pre-empted market gap identification. Without the initial scanning phase, network activation could not emerge, and consequently, institutional bridging remained impossible. Individual resilience and skill development remained confined within existing power structures, thus unable to progress through the temporal stages necessary for transformative bridging to take place. This confirms what Maguire et al. (2004) identified as the critical difference between individual adaptation and institutional entrepreneurship; thus, the latter necessitating collective capacity to create, maintain, or disrupt institutional arrangements. The result therefore maintained separation between internal adaptation and external transformation, as individual agency could not aggregate into the collective capacity necessary for structural change.

Overall, this aggregation dimension exhibits why institutional voids enable rather than constrain entrepreneurial transformation in humanitarian contexts (de la Chaux and Haugh, 2020; Heilbrunn, 2019). Specifically, shadow institutions operate as amplification mechanisms that appear to incubate, foster and convert individual agency into collective structural change, thereby demonstrating that transformative agency under extreme constraints operates through collective rather than individual pathways. These shadow institutions function as temporal and structural bridges, thereby converting individual scanning into collective activation, thus leading to institutional transformation. In essence, they operate analogous to medical stents: mechanisms that maintain the institutional void's openness, thus preventing premature closure by formal structures whilst enabling the progressive bridging processes to take place. This therefore illustrates that bridging mechanisms in displacement contexts operate as progressive

aggregation systems, thereby enabling collective transformation as opposed to individual adaptation.

7.3. DO REFUGEE ENTREPRENEURS EXHIBIT IMMUNISATION FROM INSTITUTIONAL STRUCTURES, AND HOW DOES THIS IMMUNITY TRANSLATE INTO TRANSFORMATIVE CAPACITY?

Despite homogeneous institutional structures, humanitarian agencies, and displaced populations, the two Syrian refugee camps in Jordan produced fundamentally divergent entrepreneurial outcomes. Zaatari developed into what news commentators and the UNHCR described as being city-like with over 1,800 largely autonomous businesses operating outside formal oversight. Its sister camp, Azraq, opened two years later to deal with overcrowding in Zaatari. Azraq had just 375 regulated businesses with mandatory co-ownership requirements and comprehensive institutional control. This difference leads to a critical question that remains underexplored in RE research: under what conditions do severely constrained actors develop immunity from institutional control, and how does this immunity translate into transformative capacity?

Current constrained entrepreneurship literature struggles with this conundrum due to its persistent tension between structural determinism and agentic perspectives (Refai et al., 2025). Dominant frameworks within RE discourse, namely mixed embeddedness theory and institutional theory, predominantly emphasise how structures constrain entrepreneurial possibilities, often positioning refugees or other constrained actors as victims of institutional barriers (Högberg and Mitchell, 2023) or, conversely, emphasising their resourcefulness in isolation from structural analysis (Tan, 2014). This polarisation manifests most clearly in competing perspectives on the role of institutional voids, with literature either viewing voids as constraints (Mair and Marti, 2009; Webb et al., 2020), or recognising their enabling potential for entrepreneurship (Heilbrunn, 2019; Williams et al., 2022).

These perspectives appear to share a common limitation, as they both treat institutional voids as being static rather than dynamic phenomena. Furthermore, recent systematic reviews on RE scholarship notes that existing theoretical frameworks lack the processual and temporal dimensions necessary to contextualise RE in CIC (Abebe, 2023; Lang et al., 2024). The

Zaatari-Azraq comparison, further analysed through the lens of SST, addresses two critical theoretical gaps. First, it provides a framework for understanding the recursive relationship between entrepreneurial agency and institutional change. Second, it illustrates how multiple structural dimensions, namely external constraints, imposed social positions, and agentic capacity, simultaneously configure to enable or inhibit transformation (Refai et al., 2025).

Specifically, the comparative analysis helps to accentuate the notion of *institutional immunisation*, defined as the capacity of entrepreneurial actors to operate with relative autonomy from formal institutional control mechanisms (McMullen et al., 2021). This study posits that this concept exists along a spectrum, ranging from minimal institutional control in the case of Zaatari to comprehensive regulatory oversight in the example of Azraq. Specifically, this concept is developed across these cases through four key mechanisms: 1) institutional voids as manipulated conditions, 2) shadow institutions as erosive forces, 3) collective agency as immunity amplification, and 4) immunity prevention as institutional strategy.

Figure 55 (page 252) visualises the structural configuration enabling Zaatari's refugees to exhibit institutional immunity and its connection to transformative capacity. The diagram's proportionality represents functional weight; thus, larger structures exert greater determining force on outcomes. Specifically, ES are actively compressed owing to shadow institutions actively suppressing formal institutional growth in Zaatari. These shadow institutions (i.e. territorial control networks, smuggling systems, informal credit mechanisms) appeared to not only fill Zaatari's voids but actively erode formal authority, keeping external structures small and subordinate. Thus, shadow institutional operations appeared to progressively degrade formal external capacity to assert control through their underground activities.

Internal structures (IS) capitalise on the external suppression in Zaatari through the re-embedding of Daraa's entrepreneurial culture in the camp. Daraa refugees comprised 80% of Zaatari's overall population (UNHCR, 2022), yet this study found 96% of entrepreneurs in the commercial hub originated from Daraa. This disproportionate concentration demonstrates not only demographic clustering but the transplantation of shared commercial dispositions that transformed individual immunity into collective resistance to institutional dominance. This re-embedding of collective agency achieved structural weight that ES could not overcome, thus inverting typical constrained contexts where external institutional forces dominate. Essentially,

shadow institutions appeared to function analogous to institutional antibodies, thus not merely defending against institutional control but actively attacking and weakening formal structures' through their gate-keeper gangs (i.e. shadow institutions). This erosive characteristic appeared to create a self-reinforcing cycle: as shadow institutions gain structural weight (i.e. growing in operational capacity), they actively suppress formal external growth, thereby preventing external institutional structures from achieving the influence they typically exert in CICs.

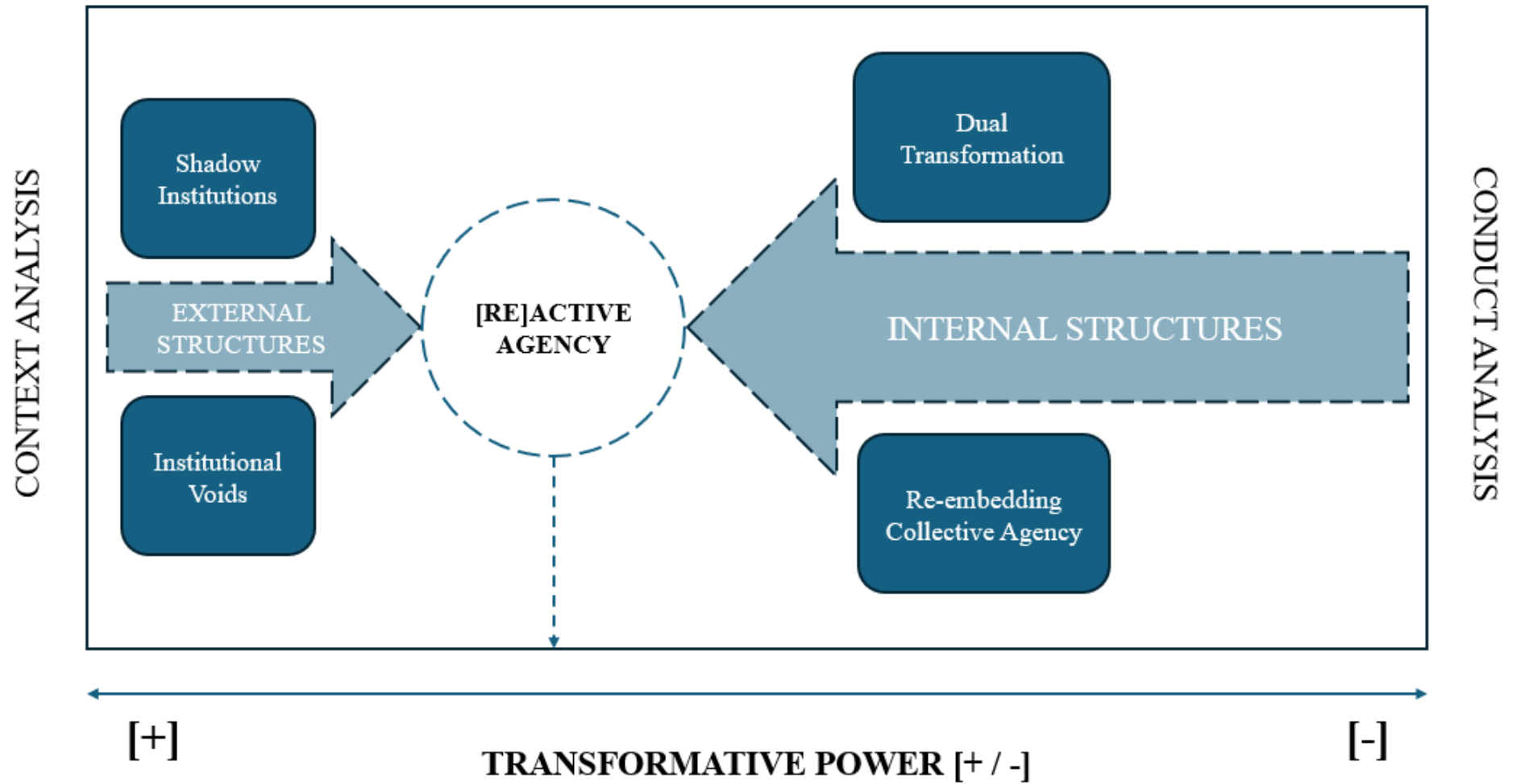


Figure 55: The dynamics of institutional immunity (ES-IS) and transformative capacity in Zaatari

In sum, this explains why Zaatari administrators found the market too difficult to manage and monitor, signifying that shadow institutions had systematically suppressed formal external structures to the point where external institutional structures possessed insufficient weight to assert meaningful control.

Concerning the notion of [re]active agency, it is found at the intersection of external (ES) and internal (IS) structures, thus affirming Elkafrawi et al.'s (2022) reconfiguration of SST. While Stones (2005) theorises active agency as a property of agents, Elkafrawi et al. (2022) proposes it as a property intertwined with both the IS of agents and the ES of norms and resources in a context. This study extends this theorisation by introducing the transformative power continuum: at the ES-IS intersection, these structures exert opposing pressures, and agency's location on the continuum thus reflects the net balance of these forces. Essentially, this continuum absorbs what Stones (2005) terms 'outcomes', rather than treating outcomes as separate from structural configurations, the continuum illustrates outcomes as direct expressions of ES-IS weighting. Thus, where IS structurally dominates ES (Zaatari), agency produces transformative outcomes [+]; where ES dominates IS (Azraq), agency produces reproductive outcomes [-].

The case of Zaatari exemplifies the transformative configuration. Weak external structures provided internal structures with space to gain structural prominence, thus tipping the net balance such that [re]active agency positioned toward the [+] end of the spectrum, enabling dual transformation: refugees reshaped both IS (i.e. 80%+ entrepreneurial pivots) and ES (i.e. Jordan's fourth-largest city). Shadow institutions' erosive and generative functions maintain this positioning by amplifying their capacity to suppress formal external power while enabling new forms of agency. This dynamic made institutional correction progressively more difficult as formal external structures (i.e. SRAD/UNHCR) could not gain sufficient structural weight to reposition agency toward the [-] end.

The following four mechanisms develop from this novel theorisation of SST: *institutional voids as manipulated conditions*, *shadow institutions as erosive forces*, *collective agency as immunity amplifier*, and *immunity prevention as institutional strategy*. Essentially, each mechanism demonstrates how immunity-enabling conditions either materialised (Zaatari) or were systematically prevented (Azraq) in this comparative case study.

7.3.1. Institutional Voids as Manipulated Conditions

The cases of Zaatari and Azraq fundamentally challenge the binary framing relating to institutional void literature. The institutional absence during Zaatari's infancy created voids that enabled autonomous market development before formal governance could establish control. By the time formal governance structures were established, refugees had already created an imposing commercial hub of over 1,800 businesses resistant to retrospective control. This immunity, reinforced by gate-keeper gangs (shadow institutions), manifested across several key dimensions: spatial immunity (refugees physically shaped commercial architecture); regulatory immunity (operating outside formal oversight); and economic immunity (autonomy over business models and supplementary supply chains).

In the Azraq camp, voids were strategically prevented. For instance, its village system deliberately contrasted Zaatari's centralised market specifically because administrators perceived Zaatari to be too problematic to manage. Azraq's spatial segregation evidently fragmented populations across four zones, preventing the concentrated networks enabling Zaatari's collective immunity. Geographic isolation (i.e. 25 kilometres from the nearest city) further reinforced its borders from refugee penetration. In addition, delayed marketplace implementation with bureaucratic allocation mechanisms such as the co-ownership model ensured the SRAD retained complete monopoly over entrepreneurial access.

This comparison illustrates the inherent limitation that both the constraint and the enabling perspectives share, treating institutional absence as static conditions thus producing predictable effects. Webb et al. (2020) positions voids as constraints while Tracey et al. (2011) highlight their enabling potential, both positions effectively assume voids as given environmental conditions. The case of these camps however exemplifies voids as manipulated conditions, whereby their effects are contingent on temporal factors, spatial configurations, demographic composition, and shadow institutional presence, as opposed to uniform conditions (Mair and Marti, 2009). Overall, Zaatari demonstrates that voids enable immunity when refugees can organise before institutions establish control, when they coordinate collectively, and when institutions overlook autonomous systems. Azraq shows modified policy leads to opposite outcomes, thus institutional control prevails when formal design structures prevent voids from emerging.

7.3.2. Shadow Institutions as Erosive Forces

The voids in Zaatari were seized upon by shadow institutions, described in this study as parallel governance systems, thereby possessing their own structures, rules, and enforcement mechanisms while operating outside formal camp authorities. This was exemplified through territorial control networks establishing authority, and resource allocation. The control over multiple streets by certain figureheads and commercial spaces with organised patrols and provision of services like free barbering typified how these structures provided public goods typically associated with formal institutions, operating with institutional like characteristics, despite lacking the approval of the UNHCR and SRAD. The example of smuggling networks converting e-card aid into cash operated according to consistent principles involving multiple coordinated actors. Furthermore, the established informal credit systems operated without formal recognition yet followed standard practices for determining economic value.

These shadow institutions embody what research describes as informal arrangements that arise when formal and informal institutions seemingly clash (Gërxhani and Cichocki, 2023). However, unlike the underground economy literature which is largely focused on individual non-compliance with formal institutions, shadow institutions in Zaatari constitute parallel structures with their own rules, enforcement mechanisms, and resource allocation systems. This distinction is particularly noteworthy as informal institutions in the shadow economy sense, typically relate to the concepts of norms, values, and social practices (North, 1990). However, in the case of refugee camps, shadow institutions appear to represent alternative governance architectures.

These actions seemingly extend understanding beyond existing constrained entrepreneurship scholarship. De la Chaux and Haugh (2020) document refugee entrepreneurs strategically engaging with both formal and informal institutions, while Williams et al. (2022) show forced migrants mobilising trusted social connections to circumvent corrupt networks. However, these framings imply adaptive bricolage, where refugees/migrants working creatively within such constraints. Yet the case of Zaatari exposes more underlying dynamics as such the notion of structured substitution with erosive capabilities. When formal institutions sought to regulate electricity supply for example, shadow institutions appeared to circumvent official channels through the illegal tapping of utilities. When formal markets were required to operate through the universal e-card system, smuggling networks saw an opportunity to convert the stored

credit into liquid cash thus increasing the refugee agents spending potential. Overall, these systems operated with minimal institutional interference for fear of anarchy, thereby leading to autonomous pathways that made formal institutions redundant to core economic activities.

Significantly, shadow institutions did not simply occupy the space created by institutional voids in the case of Zaatari, they particularly expanded the space by eroding formal institutional foundations leading to external structures becoming suppressed. This erosive capacity operates through several key mechanisms. First through *gap exploitation*: shadow institutions provide additional services that formal institutions do not, thus drawing refugees toward more lucrative yet illicit channels such as smuggling networks leading to the enablement of informal cash conversion. Second, through *social acceptance*: as shadow institutions grew their operational capacity, they subsequently gained social legitimacy from their refugee peers through their tolerated presence and operations in the camp. Third, *infrastructure decay through de-prioritisation*: formal institutions preoccupied with emergency humanitarian needs (shelter, basic provisions) evidently de-prioritised commercial governance, thus allowing shadow institutions to establish control over business operations. Fourth, through *disruption tactics*: formal and informal institutions require alignment for effective governance (Gërxhani and Cichocki, 2023). In Zaatari, shadow institutions did not merely fill voids, they actively created institutional incompatibility by upholding practices that were clearly misaligned with formal camp governance such as the inherent smuggling operations. As shadow institutions became embedded in Zaatari's commercial architecture, formal institutional infrastructure for market regulation became less relevant. This weakened institutional capacity augmented shadow institutions' role in commercial operations, further eroding formal authority over economic activities.

The concept of shadow institutions therefore represents more than mere adaptive responses to external stimuli as they institute parallel, substitutive and auxiliary structures that refugees collectively construct to resist institutional subordination. This notion refines institutional theory's application to institutional void scholarship, where Tracey et al. (2011) document institutional entrepreneurs bridging these voids by creating new organisational forms. Whilst shadow institutions demonstrate this bridging mechanism to some extent, the case of Zaatari epitomises a different dynamic, one not actualised through deliberate institutional entrepreneurship per se, but rather through collective, often uncoordinated refugee action during institutional absence.

This distinction affirms the role of distributed agency (Garud and Karnøe, 2003), where shadow institutions essentially became purveyors of agency in Zaatari through their pseudo-architectural actions thereby creating the 'Champs-Élysées of Zaatari' whilst contributing to the decline of more formalised external structures. The aggregate effect characterises why and how Zaatari's market became challenging for the authorities to manage. By the time the SRAD and UNHCR sought to reassert control, shadow institutions had become so embedded in the commercial spaces of the camp that retrospective institutional correction not only proved difficult but was considered unwise, as it may have led to refugee disorder. This was not refugees resisting institutional imposition by formal external structures directly, but the SRAD and UNHCR finding themselves trapped by the circumstances, thus reasserting authority threatened to undermine the stability shadow institutions had established.

The case of Azraq, however, demonstrates that shadow institutions do not arise predictably even across camps within the same host nation, thus challenging assumptions of institutional homogeneity. Despite housing Syrian refugees with identical displacement experiences, Azraq's design structures and meticulous planning prevented shadow institutional formation in the sister camp. This demonstrates that shadow institutions are not culturally determined or inevitable responses to displacement, but rather arise from specific institutional configurations. Azraq's design achieved what Gërxhani and Cichocki (2023) identify as critical for formal institutional effectiveness. For example, by fragmenting refugee populations spatially, controlling border permeability, delaying market development, and mandating host-national co-ownership, Azraq prevented the preconditions necessary for shadow institutions to form.

7.3.3. Collective Agency as Immunity Mechanism

Zaatari's marketplace, where 96% of entrepreneurs originated from Daraa province, created social conditions that transformed individual entrepreneurial immunity into collective feats of agency. This study affirms that collective agency manifests through team formation and shared commonalities, exemplified by the sentiments of 'We Think Alike' (i.e. overlapping profiles) and 'We Understand How Each Other Thinks' (i.e. complementary profiles) (Kier and McMullen, 2020). The Daraa refugee entrepreneurs embodied both Kier and McMullen's overlapping and complementary notions through the example family-based ventures, referring to doing business with their cousins from the same village rather than competing, thus viewing commercial relationships through a team rather than transactional lens.

This study also found that collective agency can manifest through disruptive entrepreneurial archetypes, where one entrepreneur's innovation catalyses collective participation (Refai et al., 2024). Abu Hussein (pseudonym) exemplifies this through his portfolio of 10 barbershops in Zaatari creating employment for multiple refugee barbers while offering free services that built social capital across the community. However, his capacity to initiate collective agency was inseparable from his territorial influence in Zaatari, boasting of his authority over 21 streets through informal enforcement, thus illustrating how collective agency in institutional voids can surface through power brokers whose influence derives from both market provision and coercive power.

The re-embedding of Daraa's entrepreneurial disposition further created what this study terms network-based immunity. Thus, the shared orientation toward business ownership, ingrained through cultural socialisation in Daraa province, generated collective immunity that rendered the institutionally preferred employment model, as operationalised in Azraq, untenable in Zaatari without the perceived risk of disorder. In relation, over 80% of Zaatari entrepreneurs underwent occupational transformations from employment to self-employment, thereby collectively reshaping the camp's economic infrastructure. The advent of early capital advantages combined with concentrated kinship networks created first-mover advantages that became self-reinforcing, establishing economic dominance even over refugees from other Syrian regions, notably Damascus. These family ties facilitated business knowledge transfer and created cooperative rather than competitive commercial environments, while emancipatory networks such as smuggling operations required trust across multiple actors, with technological and social media networks proving instrumental in actualising this network-based immunity.

Moreover, collective agency further amplifies shadow institutions' ability to exert erosive power. For example, while individual entrepreneurs who evade regulations may be reprimanded by the camp authorities, networks of entrepreneurs collectively operating through shadow institutions create distributed erosion that institutions cannot effectively counter. When hundreds of Daraa entrepreneurs rely on smuggling networks, the use informal credit, and recognise alternative informal structures, they collectively erode institutional control faster than institutions can salvage it, thus suppressing external (structural) growth while internal structures maintain their structural dominance. This collective output therefore proves far more detrimental to formal institutional authority than individual acts of circumvention, explaining why Zaatari's institutional structures became so overrun by refugee agency.

This finding extends Kloosterman et al.'s (1999) mixed embeddedness theory. Specifically, mixed embeddedness conceptualises embeddedness as a positioning condition, whereby immigrants are positioned within opportunity structures that leverage networks to identify market openings. Embeddedness has historically accentuated external constraints over agentic capacity (Refai et al., 2025). Zaatari, however, demonstrates embeddedness itself as an agentic mechanism, a collective structure that refugees actively construct and maintain to resist institutional subordination. The case of Azraq proves this collective dimension essential rather than incidental to immunity. Despite housing Syrian refugees with comparable displacement experiences, Azraq's heterogeneity, referring to refugees from Damascus, Homs, Daraa, and other regions, seemingly prevented collective coordination. Diverse regional origins meant there was minimal shared entrepreneurial culture comparable to Daraa's merchant traditions that were successfully transplanted in the Zaatari canvas. Absence of concentrated networks meant refugees lacked trust relationships and cooperative frameworks thus further fuelling Zaatari's shadow institution's ability to operate. This intentional fragmentation of agency from formal institutional powers meant refugees competed individually for limited opportunities. The presence of Jordanian stakeholders further fragmented the refugee community, pitting refugees against each other while subordinating them to external partners in many cases. The resulting dependency networks clearly inverted Zaatari's immunity dynamics, with refugees remaining dependent on partners for business ownership. These overlapping dependencies created a hypothetical (immunity) deficiency meaning refugees lacked the structural conditions to resist or circumvent institutional control, regardless of whether individual or collective capacity existed.

7.3.4. Immunity Prevention as Institutional Strategy

Azraq's deliberate design accentuates an underexplored dimension in institutional void scholarship: immunity prevention as institutional strategy. While studies examine how entrepreneurs circumvent voids (Sydow et al., 2022) or exploit misalignment (de la Chaux and Haugh, 2020), less attention has been paid to how institutions deliberately engineer environments to restrict entrepreneurial action. The case of Azraq epitomises that institutional structures learn from refugee immunity (i.e. Zaatari) and thus deliberately design preventative structures, what this study terms design structures as immunisation barriers to mitigate against future risks.

The explicit ‘lessons from Zaatari’ sentiments effectively capture this corrective logic, where refugee autonomy was reframed as institutional failure thus requiring remedy for future camps, namely Azraq. The subsequent spatial segregation, deliberately contrasting Zaatari's centralised market due to administrators finding it too difficult to oversee represents this notion of institutional learning entirely. Further, the concepts of geographic isolation eliminating porous borders, delayed marketplace implementation maintaining institutional gatekeeping, and mandated co-ownership ensuring institutional stakeholder presence within every business were clear examples of purpose-built mechanisms specifically designed to immunise against unwanted refugee agency.

Beyond this notion of design structures immunising against agency, Azraq further augmented this through the overarching concept of institutional correction, calculated attempts to rectify the structural shortcomings at its predecessor through comprehensive oversight and regulation. The use of population management further leveraged geographic isolation to transform identical work permit policies into constraints to those who opted remain within the camp. For instance, extended separation periods away from the camp created cyclical population dynamics that devastated Azraq's economy, with summer departures reportedly leaving only 20% of population in residence, thus made evident by its barren market spaces and high rates of business cessation. Moreover, resource control mechanisms created institutional competition with camp businesses through a central mall with deliberately lower prices than village markets, undercutting refugee businesses through subsidised pricing to maintain economic dependencies. This contrasts sharply with Zaatari, where refugee-operated markets faced no comparable institutional competition, further exemplifying the relationship between weak external structures and pronounced internal structures.

This finding suggests a potential refinement of typical institutional void theory through the example of agency-on-both-sides, refugees attempting to attain immunity, while institutions appear to actively work to negate it. Thus, rather than treating institutional presence or absence as given, the Azraq case indicates that institutional voids may be strategically ‘turned off’ or prevented entirely from emerging, an example of institutional overload as a control mechanism. This extends and complicates Mair and Marti's (2009) work on institutional voids in constrained contexts, which conceptualises voids as pre-existing conditions. The Zaatari-Azraq comparison therefore suggests that voids can be actively controlled through deliberate

institutional design, adding a dimension of strategic intentionality to void theory where the suppression of voids becomes as theoretically significant as their presence.

7.3.5. The Translation of Immunity: Transformative versus Reproductive Capacity

Zaatari's institutional immunity manifests into what this study terms dual transformation, the simultaneous change to both internal (e.g. individual identities, dispositions, capabilities) and external structures (e.g. institutional arrangements, physical spaces, power relations). This twofold change proves essential because changes in one domain alone would constitute adaptation or reproduction rather than transformation in the structural sense. The entrepreneurial pivots documented in Zaatari exemplify this transformative dynamic. Over 80% of refugee entrepreneurs underwent occupational transformations. These shifts represented more than individual adaptation, they collectively reshaped the camp's economic infrastructure. The transition from employment to self-employment challenged institutional preferences for dependent labour forces. Aggregated across hundreds of entrepreneurs, this ideological rejection of wage subordination shaped Zaatari's economic landscape, made evident by its market streets comprised almost entirely of refugee micro-enterprises. Furthermore, rural-to-urban entrepreneurial pivots contributed to the notion of dual transformation as refugees from agricultural backgrounds brought rural community norms of cooperation rather than competition into urban marketplace contexts. This transplantation of rural cooperative ethics altered the camp's economic culture, creating market structures based on mutual support, thus transforming both individual practices and collective market organisation. However, it is important to acknowledge that this transformation unfolded within conditions of weak external structures, thus what might be termed 'weak pathogens' in the 'disease-sense', where limited enforcement capacity evidently created spaces for entrepreneurial activity to flourish.

Overall, the agentic mechanisms enabling this translation operated through two interrelated processes: the collective entrepreneurial pivot and transformative nostalgia, the conversion of homeland memories and traumatic displacement experiences into entrepreneurial motivation and forward-oriented action. Refugees consistently reported channelling loss into productive action, with explicit acknowledgment of trauma followed by its repurposing into fuel for motivation. This process operated through intergenerational transmission, converting individual memory into collective future-building. For example, the training of children and

family members to take over businesses exemplified transformation of temporary displacement into settlement planning, where a yearning for Syria became reoriented toward succession planning despite encampment. Refugees did not abandon their Syrian identity but repurposed it as cultural capital for RCE, with the distinctively Daraa work ethic being a key agentic source.

Together, these mechanisms provided the motivational impetus and occupational shifts that enacted structural change, thereby leading to dual transformation in Zaatari. However, these agentic mechanisms alone may not have been sufficient. Specifically, the weak and subsequent enabling environment in Zaatari, resulting in part from the timing dynamics and extended separation periods as discussed earlier, created the structural conditions and openings that enabled its twofold transformation. The aggregation effect produced macro-level structural change. The cumulative effect was Zaatari's evolution into a commercial settlement that functioned less like a traditional camp and more like an established Syrian market town imported into Jordan. This external structural transformation of the camp itself reflected the translation of institutional immunity into transformative capacity operating at scale. However, Zaatari's transformation also produced unintended structural consequences beyond its own boundaries. The economic autonomy achieved by its refugees informed subsequent policy decisions and camp design, most notably Azraq. Rather than replicating the conditions that enabled dual transformation, institutional actors responded to Zaatari's perceived uncontrollability by designing Azraq with mechanisms explicitly intended to prevent similar refugee agency, thereby demonstrating how transformative capacity in one setting can paradoxically generate constraining structures in future iterations.

In sum, the four mechanisms detailed in this RQ: 1) institutional voids as manipulated conditions, 2) shadow institutions as erosive forces, 3) collective agency as immunity amplifier, and 4) immunity prevention as institutional strategy, together illustrate why Zaatari attained the structural asymmetry necessary for both external and internal (dual) transformation. The weak external structures created space for pronounced internal structure development, enabling recursive agency that reshaped both domains. Azraq's counterfactual evidence demonstrates the systematic prevention of immunity-producing conditions across each of these four mechanisms. Visualising this countering narrative will invariably help conceptualise their implications for transformative capacity.

Figure 56 (page 264) illustrates the Azraq counter narrative: external structures (ES) clearly dominate thereby constraining internal structures (IS), hence the juxtaposition of Zaatari's configuration. ES achieve dominance through the aggregate themes of design structures and institutional correction. The village system's spatial segregation, geographic isolation (i.e. 25 km from cities), delayed marketplace implementation, and mandated co-ownership system all represent deliberate institutional action thus preventing IS from achieving the same dominance observed at Zaatari. Significantly, the threat of shadow institutions was irradiated through the implementation of strict design structures preventing their formation, thereby eliminating the mechanism that would suppress ES growth. Without shadow institutions' erosive force, formal ES achieved and maintained the structural prominence they typically possess in CICs. This ultimately led to IS becoming compressed through the re-embedding fragmented agency. Azraq's heterogeneous Syrian origins (i.e. Damascus, Homs, Daraa populations) further prevented the concentrated networks that gave IS prominence in Zaatari.

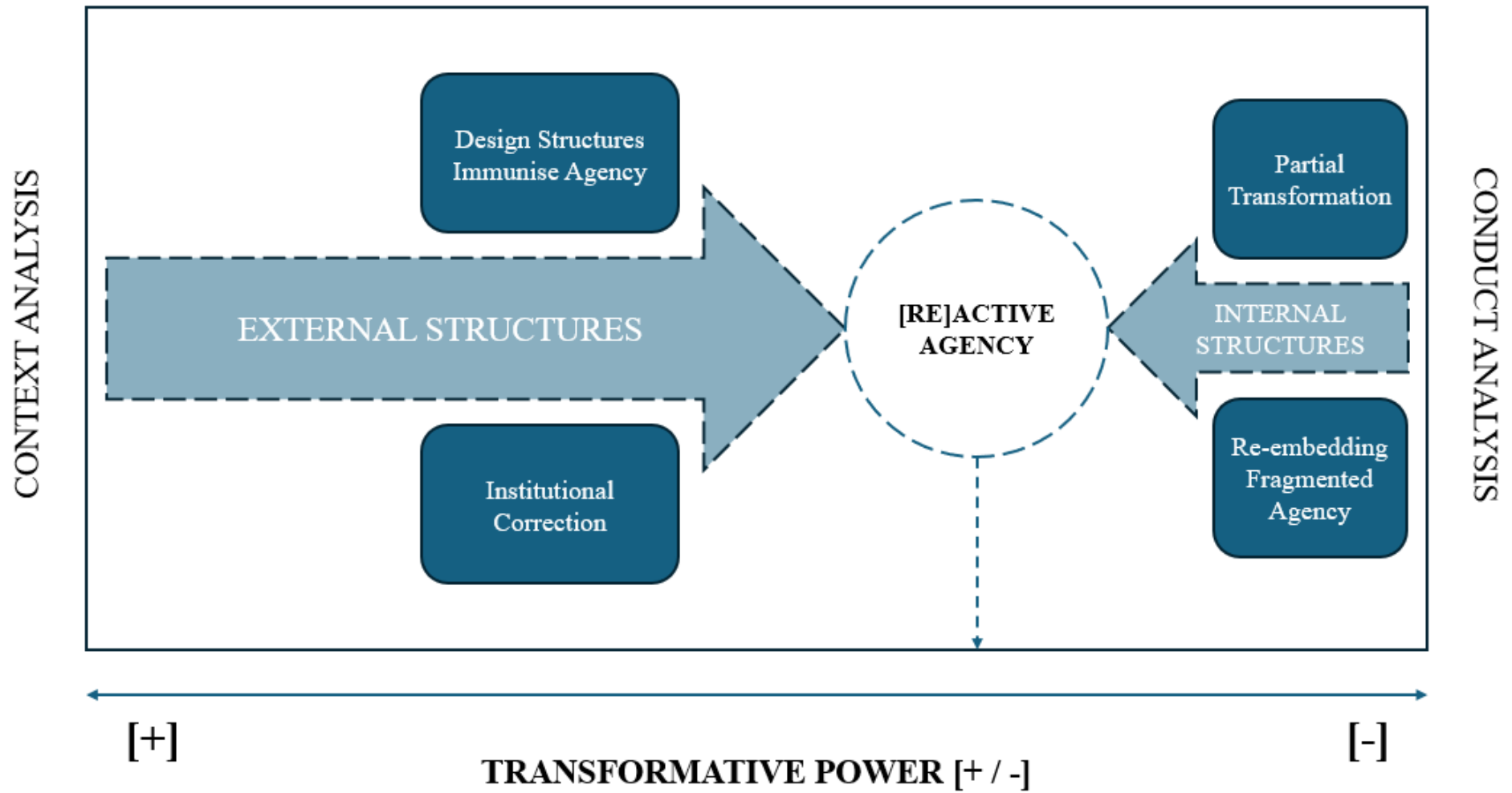


Figure 56: The dynamics of immunity prevention and reproductive capacity in Azraq

Mandatory Jordanian partnerships further fragmented refugee communities, creating dependency networks unlike the emancipatory networks observed in Zaatari. Consequently, the IS therefore lacked the structural weight to challenge the resultant ES dominance, thus tipping the agency scales toward negative capacity. The transformative power axis shows this at the negative ([−]) end whereby ES dominance produces partial transformation (reshaping individuals within unchanged structures) thus upholding structural reproduction in Azraq.

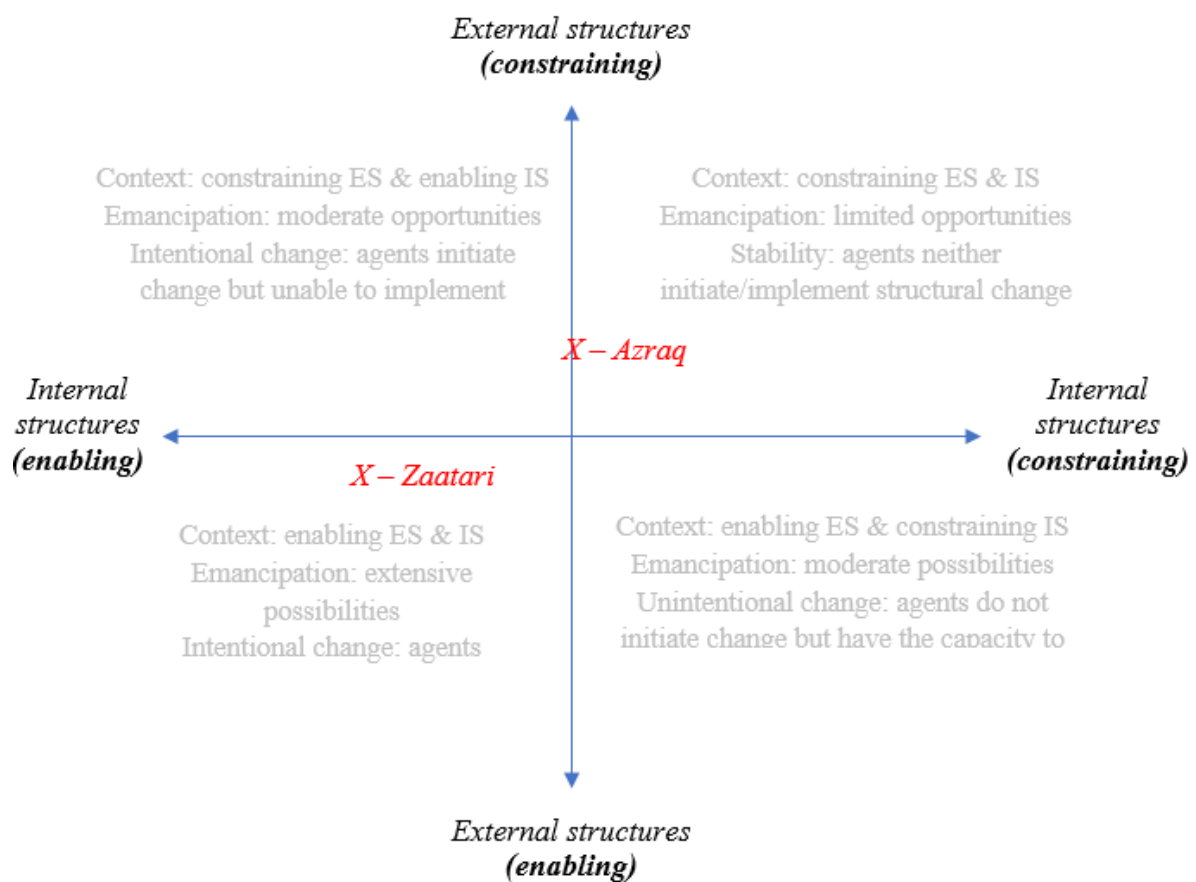


Figure 57: The ES-IS configuration matrix (adapted from Kholeif and Jack 2018)

This juxtaposition helps accentuate the study's core contribution. Building on Kholeif and Jack's (2018) framework, transformative capacity relies heavily on the notion ES-IS weighting, rather than entrepreneurial activity in isolation. While both camps exhibit commendable acts of entrepreneurship, only Zaatari achieved transformation owing to its enabling (or weak) external structures leading to pronounced internal structures. Azraq's dominance in their external structure constrained agency to the individual level, thus producing reproductive

capacity. Applying Kholeif and Jack's (2018) ES-IS configuration matrix to these cases (Figure 57) positions Zaatari in the enabling IS/ES quadrant where intentional structural change becomes possible, while Azraq occupies the constraining IS/constraining ES quadrant characterised by stability and limited emancipatory opportunities. Moreover, the framing of ES-IS essentially reflects Welter's (2011, p. 173) call for "theories of context" that integrate both top-down contextual effects with bottom-up agentic processes. When ES dominates (Azraq), top-down formal institutional constraints prevent bottom-up shadow institutional formation (i.e. context determines outcomes). However, when IS achieves supremacy (i.e. Zaatari), bottom-up collective agency erodes top-down formal structures (i.e. agency transforms context). This bidirectional relationship challenges one-way assumptions in institutional theory (Gërxhani and Cichocki, 2023; Welter, 2011) by demonstrating that refugees do not merely adapt to institutional contexts, they can restructure them under prerequisite conditions.

This potentially reframes the question from *do refugee entrepreneurs exhibit immunity?* to *under what configurations of ES-IS weighting does institutional immunity lead to transformative capacity?* The answer appears to be that institutional immunity requires IS ascendancy over ES, a configuration exemplified in the example of Zaatari through shadow institutions' erosive suppression of formal ES, and systematically prevented in Azraq through design structures that entirely blocked shadow institutional formation thus maintaining ES supremacy. Kholeif and Jack's (2018) framework thus demonstrates that transformative capacity appears to surface not from any single structural condition but from the specific asymmetry between ext-int structures, a theoretical insight with implications for understanding agency in any given environment.

The contrasting agentic mechanisms further illuminate this structural distinction. Where Zaatari refugees exhibited transformative nostalgia that converted homeland memories into entrepreneurial motivation and forward-oriented action, Azraq demonstrated what this study terms paralysing nostalgia, a form of homeland connection generating passive acceptance of circumstances. Azraq refugees' nostalgic expressions consistently emphasised safety-based ideals, thereby positioning current conditions as acceptable end-states rather than temporary foundations requiring improvement. This reversal essentially shows that nostalgia's transformative or paralysing character depends critically on the structural conditions within which it operates. Without the temporal advantages, collective coordination capacity, and

shadow institutional formation that enabled Zaatari's internal structure ascendancy, similar entrepreneurial motivations in Azraq thus remained confined to the individual dimension. The 375 registered businesses in Azraq compared to Zaatari's 1,800+ reflects not refugee incapacity but the constraining effect of external dominance on translating agency into transformative outcomes.

7.4. Implications for Theory and Practice

7.4.1. Theoretical Contributions

The findings of this study carry several significant implications for entrepreneurship theory, institutional analysis, and the sociology of constrained agency.

The Zaatari-Azraq comparison fundamentally unsettles the binary framing that has characterised institutional void scholarship. The debate between Mair and Martí (2009), who emphasise voids as sources of constraint, and Williams et al. (2022), who highlight their enabling potential, has proceeded largely without empirical resolution because both positions are correct, but only under specific configurational conditions. The enabling-constraining spectrum developed here thus offers a theoretical remedy by specifying the conditions under which each effect predominates. Temporal emergence, spatial-demographic configuration, and regulatory variance are not merely contextual descriptors but active determinants of whether voids surface and how they function. This has important implications for how scholars conceptualise institutional context: Welter's (2011) call for theories of context that treat settings as both asset and liability finds empirical grounding here, while Kimjeon and Davidsson's (2022) notion of partial enablement is extended into a more dynamic and processual framework. The implication for institutional theory more broadly is that context cannot be treated as a static background variable, thus it is a configurational force whose effects are temporally and spatially contingent.

The shadow institutions concept advances the literature on informal institutional responses to incompleteness in ways that existing frameworks have not anticipated. Where de la Chaux and Haugh (2020) identify the problem of how refugees navigate institutional gaps, this study provides the mechanism: shadow institutions do not merely substitute for absent formal structures but actively erode them while simultaneously aggregating fragmented individual agency into coordinated collective action. This dual function, stent and antibody operating

concurrently, inverts the institutional hierarchy observed in transition economy scholarship, where formal institutions retain structural dominance despite individual non-compliance (Gërxhani and Cichocki, 2023). In Zaatari, shadow institutions achieved structural substitution rather than mere evasion, rendering formal governance largely redundant to commercial activity. The implication for collective agency theory is significant: distributed agency (Garud and Karnøe, 2003) in severely constrained contexts requires not only network activation but an erosive mechanism that progressively weakens the formal structures constraining it. Individual entrepreneurial ingenuity alone is insufficient, hence transformation requires mechanisms that operate at the collective level across progressive phases of opportunity scanning, network activation, and institutional bridging (Louise and Jiang, 2018).

The ES-IS asymmetry finding extends Elkafrawi et al.'s (2022) reconfiguration of SST in a theoretically consequential direction. Where Elkafrawi et al. position agency at the nexus of the ES-IS intersection, this study demonstrates that the intersection alone is insufficient to explain transformative outcomes, it is the specific weighting or asymmetry between ES and IS at that intersection that determines whether agency produces transformation or reproduction. This has implications for how SST is applied in contexts of extreme constraint: the framework's analytical power lies not in identifying where agency and structure meet but in specifying the directional dominance at that meeting point. Azraq's ES dominance constrained agency to individual-level adaptation within unchanged structural arrangements, while Zaatari's IS supremacy enabled dual transformation across both internal identities and external structures. This bidirectional relationship challenges one-way assumptions in institutional theory (Welter, 2011) and demonstrates that severely constrained actors can fundamentally restructure their context when internal structuration achieves sufficient collective weight.

Beyond entrepreneurship scholarship, these findings speak to broader interdisciplinary debates. For sociology, the emergence of shadow institutions as parallel governance structures within formally controlled spaces contributes to longstanding debates on informal institutional resistance and the relationship between human agency and institutional reproduction (Giddens, 1984; Stones, 2005). The stent and antibody typologies offer a novel vocabulary for theorising how marginalised populations generate structural alternatives when formal mechanisms exclude or fail them. For work and employment studies, the findings raise important questions about livelihood construction and economic participation outside conventional employment relationships in contexts where legal ambiguity precludes formal market integration. The camp

as a unit of analysis offers a rare empirical window into how economic life emerges under conditions of encampment, forced immobility, and humanitarian governance, with implications for organisational sociology and institutional theory that extend well beyond refugee studies.

7.4.2. Practical Implications

These theoretical insights potentially carry important implications for humanitarian and camp design policy. First, policymakers should recognise that adequate entrepreneurship support requires addressing structural barriers rather than simply developing individual capabilities. Focusing entirely on micro-level entrepreneurial activities when outcomes are determined by macro-level dynamics constitutes what research calls an epistemological fallacy (Korsgaard et al., 2025). Further, effective interventions must therefore address temporal windows by facilitating organic development before imposing control, spatial-demographic configurations by allowing collective capacity, and regulatory frameworks by enabling autonomous action. Second, the findings suggest that comprehensive institutional design can constrain refugee agency by eliminating the organic development processes through which transformative capacity emerges. Thus, Azraq's systematic institutional design, including mandatory co-ownership requirements and centralised market structures, demonstrates how extreme formal coverage limit the space where informal institutional development can arise naturally. This complicates the presumption that comprehensive institutional control improves refugee outcomes, suggesting instead that balanced approaches allowing adaptive regulatory flexibility may better enable refugees to develop context-appropriate responses. Third, the role of demographic composition in shaping collective agency suggests that spatial arrangements directly influence economic outcomes by either facilitating or fragmenting entrepreneurial coordination among displaced populations. While heterogeneous mixing may serve integration goals in the case of Azraq, this study showed that concentrated homogeneous populations like in Zaatari can enable the collective capacity necessary for economic self-sufficiency during critical early settlement periods. Policy decisions regarding camp design invariably involve trade-offs between competing objectives, refugee economic autonomy versus institutional control, thus requiring careful deliberation amongst the stakeholder mix.

In sum, this study does not advocate for deliberately creating institutional voids or overly romanticising the case of Zaatari, which included problematic elements like territorial control and corruption. Rather, the findings highlight tensions between humanitarian control

mechanisms and refugee self-determination that require careful design planning. Overall, this comparative study shows that binary outcomes considered uncontrollable or orderly, reflect different configurations of agency and structure with obvious implications for both humanitarian effectiveness and refugee autonomy.

7.5. Study Limitations and Future Directions

7.5.1. Limitations

This study exhibits several methodological limitations that warrant acknowledgment. While Eisenhardt (2021) typically recommends selecting between four to ten cases for comparative research to enable pattern identification and theoretical replication, this study employed only two cases as its theoretical sample. This reduced sample size limits the study's capacity to identify diverse patterns across multiple configurations of ES-IS weighting within refugee camp contexts. However, the selection of Zaatari and Azraq as polar types with common antecedents aligns with Eisenhardt's (2021) emphasis on theoretical sampling, whereby cases exhibiting stark contrasts despite similar origins can explain causal mechanisms. Furthermore, the two-case design limits transferability to other displacement settings. The Zaatari-Azraq comparison represents a specific configuration of host nation policy, camp governance structures, and refugee populations that may not transfer to camps in other regions or involving different nationalities. Notably, even within Jordan, Palestinian refugee camps operating under the separate UNRWA governance with generational displacement since the 1967 Naksa represent fundamentally different structural conditions than the Syrian camps examined here, thus suggesting that findings may not transfer even across contexts within the same host nation.

Second, the retrospective nature of data collection presents temporal limitations. Zaatari had been established for over a decade before fieldwork commenced, meaning the study captures current markers of entrepreneurial outcomes. This retrospective lens particularly affects understanding of temporal-institutional dynamics, as the study attempts to piece together early void periods through participant recall rather than direct observation of institutional gap formation. Additionally, the use of retroduction to identify underlying mechanisms from these retrospective observations means the study infers causal processes from their outcomes rather than observing causation as it unfolds, potentially introducing interpretive uncertainties about the sequence and interaction of temporal, spatial, and regulatory factors during Zaatari's

formative period. While naturalistic data sources including interviews (secondary) with former camp managers, news archives, documentary sources and UNHCR dashboard data partially mitigate this limitation, the inability to observe Zaatari's critical early formation period invariably limits the understanding of how shadow institutions initially surfaced and gained structural traction.

Third, access constraints imposed by the UNHCR SOPs limited fieldwork to designated marketplace areas during specific timeframes, with total access restricted to two-day periods within single two-week windows (Appendix B). This condensed fieldwork schedule therefore prevented prolonged engagement with refugee camp participants and further confined observation to commercial zones. Consequently, the restriction to marketplace areas excluded potential home-based businesses or entrepreneurs operating informally from residential units, which likely exist in both camps but remained inaccessible under the permit conditions. This sampling constraint means the study involved only formally visible commercial activity in designated spaces, customarily underrepresenting the complete scope of entrepreneurial activities within camp environments.

Additionally, access restrictions to Villages 2 and 5 in Azraq created potential sampling bias whereby entrepreneurial activities in these excluded areas remain unknown. While no formal explanation was provided at the time of permit approval, I later learned that these restrictions likely stemmed from security concerns, as these villages housed residents originating from Raqqa, the former ISIS capital, suggesting heightened institutional control in specific camp areas based on residents' geographic origins. Furthermore, the presence of police and security personnel during fieldwork visits introduced additional constraints, with certain interview questions being vetoed by authorities. Specifically, inquiries relating to informal supply chains and cross-camp activities were prohibited, thereby preventing direct investigation of mechanisms later identified as significant. This censorship prevented direct validation of shadow institutional findings through participant testimony, leading me to supplement observational inference with triangulated evidence from secondary sources, naturalistic data, and humanitarian stakeholder interviews. Moreover, the use of camp guides and translators, while addressing language barriers and safety protocols, introduced potential mediation effects whereby participant responses may have been influenced by translator presence or guide relationships with camp authorities.

Fourth, the actual sampling approach focused predominantly on operational business owners. This survivor bias potentially inflates perceptions of entrepreneurial success while obscuring understanding of constraint mechanisms that prevent business formation or cessation. Furthermore, the necessity of conducting refugee interviews on business premises during operational hours led to interview durations ranging between 10-20 minutes, thus limiting the depth of inquiry. Additionally, interviews were cross-sectional in nature, meaning participants were interviewed only once despite multiple fieldwork visits to each camp. This single-point-in-time approach prevents understanding of how entrepreneurial experiences, motivations, and structural conditions evolved over time. Moreover, geopolitical events including the Israel-Gaza conflict following 7 October 2023 and the Tower 22 attack in Jordan (28 January 2024) significantly complicated further follow-up fieldwork visits, effectively precluding additional data collection that may have facilitated temporal tracking of entrepreneurial trajectories. While triangulation with longer interviews with humanitarian officials, translator debriefings, and fieldwork notes partially addressed these limitations, the overall condensed timeframe with refugee entrepreneurs themselves invariably constrained a nuanced understanding of their lived experiences.

Fifth, the single-researcher design ostensibly led to further within-methodological constraints. The researcher's non-refugee status, male gender, and Western institutional affiliation positioned them as a WEIRD researcher studying a non-WEIRD population, thus creating power asymmetries that may have influenced participant responses. Importantly, the researcher's gender prevented access to women entrepreneurs, as cultural and religious norms within the camps prohibited male researchers from interviewing women. This exclusion represents not only a significant sampling limitation but also a theoretical one. At the sampling level, the study captures only male entrepreneurial experiences and perspectives, thereby obscuring understanding of how gender shapes entrepreneurial agency, collective coordination, and structural transformation. At the theoretical level, the absence of women's experiences constrains the analytical reach of the study's core contributions. It remains unknown, for instance, whether shadow institutions operate differently for women entrepreneurs, whether the enabling-constraining spectrum manifests along gendered lines, or whether ES-IS asymmetries produce divergent outcomes across gender. Women's entrepreneurship in camp settings may involve distinct modalities of collective action, informal network formation, and institutional navigation that the current framework is insufficiently equipped to capture. Existing literature documents that refugee women entrepreneurs face distinct constraints and

employ different strategies than their male counterparts (Al-Dajani et al., 2019), and there is growing recognition that gender intersects with institutional context in ways that fundamentally shape entrepreneurial agency (Brush et al., 2019). The absence of women's voices in this study therefore represents a boundary condition on the generalisability of its theoretical contributions, and future research should treat the gendered dimensions of RCE.

Furthermore, the absence of inter-coder reliability checks meant all coding and data structuring was conducted solely by the same investigator. While the Gioia method provides systematic data structuring procedures, the lack of multiple coders meant emergent themes remained unchallenged, thus potentially leading to researcher bias. Additionally, reliance on translation introduces potential meaning loss or cultural interpretation gaps, despite employing qualified and experienced camp translators.

Finally, the theoretical framework itself presents limitations. While SST offers a valuable bracketing method for examining agency-structure dynamics, its application to CICs like refugee camps remains in its infancy. To date, only Elkafrawi et al.'s (2022) has employed SST within a CIC (i.e. rural entrepreneurship), meaning this research extends SST into a fundamentally different contextual terrain. This means the study operates without established precedent for applying SST concepts to contexts characterised for example by extreme institutional control, forced migration, and encampment. Furthermore, SST itself carries Western epistemological origins, having been developed by Stones (2005) as an extension of Giddens' structuration theory within Anglo-European social science traditions. Its core constructs i.e. conjuncturally-specific internal structures, general dispositional structures, and the conduct-context quadrant, were formulated without reference to displacement, encampment, or Global South institutional conditions. Thus, applying SST to refugee camp entrepreneurship therefore risks, however unintentionally, replicating what Henrich et al. (2010) term WEIRD, theoretical assumptions in a fundamentally non-WEIRD empirical context. This study sought to mitigate this risk by using SST as an analytical lens rather than a prescriptive framework, allowing empirical conditions to generate conceptual extensions. Nevertheless, the foundational Western architecture of SST remains a limitation that future research should address directly.

7.5.2. Future Directions

The aforesaid limitations suggest several potential areas for future inquiry. First, longitudinal studies tracking camps from inception through to maturation may adequately capture the real-time emergence of institutional voids, shadow institution formation, and the temporal dynamics that enable or constrain collective agency. Such research may explicate whether the temporal-institutional patterns identified in this study may represent consistent mechanisms or context-specific configurations. Second, cross-national comparative research that can verify the enabling-constraining spectrum across multiple host nations may help clarify which findings transfer to alternative displacement contexts versus those that are Jordan-specific or other refugee host-nation specific. Third, future research that incorporates failed or abandoned entrepreneurial attempts to understand constraint mechanisms more comprehensively would be commendable. Thus, sampling strategies that incorporate both successful and unsuccessful entrepreneurship would help elucidate the interplay between agentic responses and structural conditions that lead to divergent entrepreneurial outcomes, thereby showing how refugees resist, or succumb to institutional barriers in practice. Additionally, research employing female frontline researchers to access female refugee entrepreneurs in such contexts would address the gender gap in this study, examining whether transformative capacity mechanisms operate differently across gender lines. Fourth, further applications of SST to diverse CICs would establish whether the framework's constructs require further modification/extension for extreme contexts like refugee camps or whether the current re-conceptualisation adequately captures structuration processes within CICs. Fifth, research examining urban RE could test whether temporal-spatial-regulatory dynamics operate differently outside camp confines, clarifying boundary conditions for the ES-IS framework and institutional immunity concepts developed here. Finally, future research should actively pursue theoretical frameworks grounded in Global South epistemologies or developed inductively from non-WEIRD empirical contexts, rather than adapting Western social theory to displacement settings post hoc. Candidates include Ubuntu-informed conceptions of entrepreneurship agency (Jaravaza et al., 2025), Islamic economic frameworks (Ali, 2024) relevant to majority-Muslim displaced populations, or theoretical constructs developed from within the humanitarian and refugee studies traditions themselves. Such approaches may surface mechanisms of entrepreneurial action that Western frameworks are seemingly structurally ill-equipped to capture.

7.6. Chapter Summary

This chapter addressed the study's three research questions through comparative analysis of Zaatari and Azraq, developing a nuanced understanding of how institutional configurations shape the transformative capacity of refugee entrepreneurs in constrained contexts. The analysis demonstrated that institutional constraints do not operate as fixed binary conditions but vary along an enabling-constraining spectrum determined by temporal, spatial-demographic, and regulatory factors. Shadow institutions emerged as dual-functioning mechanisms central to collective agency, and ES-IS asymmetry was established as a determinant of whether entrepreneurial action produces transformative or reproductive outcomes. The chapter further identified the study's methodological limitations and suggested directions for future inquiry. Chapter 8 synthesises these findings into the study's broader theoretical and practical contributions and offers concluding reflections.

CHAPTER 8: CONCLUSION

8.0. Introduction

This thesis examined the transformative capacity of refugee entrepreneurs within constrained institutional contexts using a comparative case study design. Motivated by persistent tensions between structural determinism and agentic perspectives in RE scholarship, the study employed SST as both an analytical and methodological framework to investigate how institutional constraints shape refugee agency, whether entrepreneurs preserve or challenge existing structures, and under what conditions severely constrained actors develop immunity from institutional control. This concluding chapter synthesises the study's key findings, reflects on its broader implications and methodological considerations, and offers directions for future research.

8.1. Key Findings and Contributions

The study demonstrated that identical institutional structures and humanitarian agencies, housing the same displaced Syrian population, produced fundamentally divergent entrepreneurial outcomes across the two cases. This divergence generated three primary theoretical contributions, developed in full in Chapter 7, and summarised here in terms of their significance for the field.

The enabling-constraining spectrum reframes institutional void theory by demonstrating that voids are neither inherently constraining nor enabling but function along a continuum shaped by temporal emergence, spatial-demographic configuration, and regulatory variance. Shadow institutions are introduced as dual-functioning mechanisms, operating simultaneously as stents and antibodies that erode formal structures while bridging individual agency into collective transformative capacity. The ES-IS asymmetry contribution extends SST by demonstrating that transformative capacity depends on the specific weighting between external and internal structures, with IS supremacy producing transformative outcomes and ES dominance producing reproductive ones. Together these contributions advance constrained entrepreneurship scholarship, institutional void theory, and structuration literature by providing a configurational framework sensitive to context, temporality, and collective agency.

8.2. Broader Implications

Beyond these theoretical contributions, this research carries broader implications for entrepreneurship scholarship, humanitarian policy, and general social science. For entrepreneurship scholarship, the study challenges persistent dichotomies between agent-centric and structure-centric perspectives that Refai et al. (2025) identify as limiting the field. By demonstrating how entrepreneurial agency and institutional structures recursively constitute each other through temporal, spatial, and regulatory interactions, this research provides a processual framework that captures the dynamic interplay typically obscured by static analytical approaches. The finding that the same national policy framework can produce differing outcomes when implemented in different camp configurations and locations fundamentally questions assumptions of policy transferability and highlights the necessity of attending to configurational logic when examining entrepreneurship in CICs.

For humanitarian policy, the findings suggest that comprehensive institutional design can inadvertently constrain refugee economic self-sufficiency by eliminating the organic development processes through which transformative capacity can arise. Azraq's systematic institutional architecture, including mandatory co-ownership requirements and centralised market structures, demonstrates how well-intentioned control mechanisms can limit the space where context-appropriate entrepreneurial responses naturally develop. This complicates the presumption that comprehensive institutional oversight improves refugee outcomes, suggesting instead that balanced approaches allowing regulatory flexibility may better enable displaced populations to develop sustainable livelihoods. Importantly, this study does not advocate for deliberately creating institutional voids or overly romanticising the outlier status of Zaatari. Instead, it highlights necessary tensions between humanitarian control mechanisms and refugee self-determination that require careful resolve by institutional stakeholders.

For social science and management practitioners, this research demonstrates the analytical utility of combining SST's methodological bracketing with CR's retroduction. The systematic separation of context (external conditions) and conduct (agentic responses), followed by integration of the study's aggregate themes through the refined SST framework (i.e. ES-IS dynamic), facilitated rigorous analysis of complex causation that neither purely interpretive nor purely positivist approaches could achieve. This methodological contribution suggests

potential applications beyond refugee studies to any empirical domain characterised by severe constraints on human agency.

8.3. Reflections on Methodology

This study's comparative design, theoretical sampling, and triangulation across multiple data sources provided a rigorous basis for causal inference. The use of Azraq as a theoretical counterfactual to Zaatari strengthened analytical confidence in the mechanisms producing divergent outcomes. The key methodological limitations, the two-case design, retrospective data collection, access constraints, and the exclusion of women entrepreneurs, are documented in full in Chapter 7. Taken together, these limitations define the boundary conditions of the study's theoretical contributions and motivate the future research directions outlined below.

8.4. Future Research Directions

The methodological and theoretical limitations outlined in Chapter 7 suggest several directions for future inquiry, including longitudinal comparative studies, gender-inclusive research designs, further applications of SST to diverse constrained contexts, and the pursuit of Global South epistemological frameworks. Beyond these specific directions, the broader research agenda opened by this study invites scholars across entrepreneurship, sociology, and humanitarian studies to treat refugee camp contexts not as peripheral cases but as generative empirical sites from which new theoretical contributions can emerge.

8.5. Concluding Remarks

This thesis began by identifying persistent tensions within refugee entrepreneurship scholarship between structural determinism and agentic perspectives. Through comparative analysis of Zaatari and Azraq, it demonstrated that transformative capacity surfaces not from entrepreneurial activity alone, nor from structural conditions in isolation, but from specific asymmetries between external institutional constraints and the internal collective capabilities of agents. The finding that identical humanitarian structures produced fundamentally divergent outcomes challenges assumptions of institutional homogeneity and policy transferability, highlighting instead the configurational logic through which temporal, spatial, and regulatory factors shape whether constraints enable or inhibit agency.

The study's core contribution lies in advancing understanding of institutional immunisation in constrained contexts: shadow institutions maintain entrepreneurial openings while eroding formal authority, and collective agency aggregates fragmented individual responses into structural change. These dynamics extend beyond refugee studies to broader questions of how marginalised populations negotiate institutional barriers and how informal governance surfaces in regulatory voids.

Ultimately, this thesis argues that understanding refugee entrepreneurship requires moving beyond binary framings of constraint versus opportunity, structure versus agency, and success versus failure, toward frameworks sensitive to configurational causation, temporal dynamics, and mutual constitution. The ES-IS weighting approach provides one such framework, and future research should test its explanatory power across other contexts of severe institutional control. As global displacement continues to intensify, understanding these dynamics represents an urgent imperative for developing policies that support rather than constrain refugee self-determination.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Ethics Approval & Gen AI guidance

(double click embedded macro to access)



Ethics Approval.pdf



UoL-GenAI-guidance-
for-postgraduate-researchers.pdf

Appendix B: Camp Permit Request, Authorisation Letter (Arabic) & UNHCR Standard Operating Procedures (SOP)

The Ministry of Interior
Arjan Amman - Jordan, PO Box 100
Amman -11118
Jordan

20 April 2023

FAO: Ministry of Interior

Re: Camp Visit Permit | Mr Yousef Qaisi | Passport No. 126965437

1. Please accept this **official letter from the University of Leeds (UK)** requesting access for the primary researcher (**Mr Yousef Qaisi**) to visit the Zaatari/Azraq refugee camps.
2. Please find a copy of Mr Yousef Qaisi **passport (British)** as per the request of the Ministry of Interior (page 3 of this document)

Research aim/objective: To examine the entrepreneurial activities/practices of Syrian refugees within refugee camp settings in Jordan.

Proposed fieldwork dates:

Aug 2023 (2 weeks)
Dec 2023 (2 weeks)
Apr 2024 (2 weeks)
Aug 2024 (2 weeks)

Research relevance

To date, much of the existing literature and academic attention surrounding refugees focuses on their integration and assimilation within developed western contexts (i.e. Europe), yet the UNHCR estimates that 72% of refugees are hosted by neighbouring countries. In the Middle East, for example, this includes countries as Jordan, Turkey & Lebanon, that received high numbers of Syrian refugees. Resultantly, little empirical research exists on the socio-economic propensity of refugees particularly within the so-called developing nations. The UNHCR further reports that a total of 6.6 million refugees globally reside in refugee camp settlements. Whilst these settlements primarily serve a humanitarian function, they contain intricate market economies and some remarkable entrepreneurial feats have been highlighted:

<https://www.unhcr.org/innovation/10-refugees-who-will-change-your-perception-of-entrepreneurship/>.

Thus, with your permission, I would kindly like to research the entrepreneurial activities of the refugee camp entrepreneurs at the Zaatari & Azraq refugee camps. This research will further highlight the profound examples of human agency within precarious contexts, further contributing to academic knowledge and effective policymaking. Following the project, we will share the key findings of our research in the form of a summary report which may be useful for your administration, operations and future policymaking surrounding the notion of refugee livelihoods within camp settlements.

Yours sincerely



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20/04/2023





السادة جامعة ليدز - مركز دراسات المشاريع وريادة الأعمال

الموضوع : جامعة ليدز - مركز دراسات

المشاريع وريادة الأعمال

إشارة لكتابكم الوارد إلينا بتاريخ ٢٠ / ٤ / ٢٠٢٣ م

١. يسرنا إعلامكم انه لا مانع من إجابة الطلب المنوه عنه بالإشارة أعلاه .

٢. لإجراء اتكم لطفاً _____ .

واقبلوا الاحترام

العميد الركن

مدير مديرية شؤون اللاجئين السوريين بالوكالة

أشرف محمود العمري

نسخة /

مع صورة عن المشار اليه باعلاه مرفقاً بطيه صورة عن كتاب وزارة الداخلية رقم
م/٥ ت/١٢٣٢٤/٣٣٩٧٢ تاريخ ٢٩/٥/٢٠٢٣ م لاجراءاتكم باستثناء الفريقين الثانية
والخامسة في مخيم الأزرق .

- مدير مخيم الزعتر
- مدير مخيم الأزرق بالانبار
- شعبة المنظمات والهيئات الدولية
- رئيس فرع امن وقائي مخيمات اللاجئين السوريين .



Visitors Permits & Access to camps

(e.g., content mission, Goodwill Ambassador Team, academia, etc.)

All visitors should obtain permits for both urban areas and camps in Jordan. Humanitarian agencies cannot facilitate access to the camps but could assist with the permit requests as all requests should be addressed to the **Syrian Refugees Affairs Directorate (SRAD)**.

Guidelines for permits

a) *Permit request procedure for foreign and national visitors:*

- Address a letter to **(His Excellency Brigadier General Ashraf Al-Amreen, Director of Syrian Refugee Affairs Directorate in Jordan)**.
- The letter should include the intent of the visit - **specifying purpose/focus of the visit and itinerary of the trip** (i.e., duration of stay, which camps and filming requirements - if any).
- Send the letter to SRAD in Amman premises in **Shafa Badran**, next to Driver and Vehicle Licensing Department.
- In your letter, **provide the name of the visit** (e.g., Embassy visit, Minister, university, school, etc.), **names of each member of the team** (e.g., translator, driver, etc.) specifying the **occupation of each member - including a clear copy of each passport**. This applies to both Jordanians and non-Jordanians.
- Provide the **vehicle(s) details** in advance, along with the **driver(s) names and IDs** and request that they be added to the permit before leaving for the camp. The inclusion of the vehicle details enables the vehicles to enter the camp (no taxis are allowed within the camps).
- **A list of equipment that will enter the camps** (e.g. cameras, video cameras, tripod, recorder...etc.).

Please note that the request should be made at least **two to three weeks before you intend to visit the location in mind**. Once you have submitted your request, you may want to follow up on the status of your request (using the reference number) after one week by calling **SRAD HQ in Amman on +962 (06) 196 (ext. 754 211 / 754 213)** – office hours are from 09.00am to 2.00pm (GMT +3), from Sundays to Thursdays.

b) *Validity of the permit:*

- Permits are usually granted for two days in the camps over a period of 2 weeks, from 09:00 to 15:00.
- Access to both Zaatari and Azraq camps is from Sunday to Thursday.

c) *Once the permit is granted*

- You should go in person to **SRAD HQ in Amman** (Shafa Badran, next to Driver and Vehicle Licensing Department) to collect it. Ideally, and if you're coming from abroad, you should plan to be in Amman during business hours at least the day before you intend to first visit Azraq, or Zaatari or even urban areas to get the permission letter, more time is preferable to avoid any delays/issues.

AZRAQ

Access to Azraq

- Visitors are permitted to access the camp between **09:00hrs and 15:00hrs, from Sunday to Wednesday (except public/UN holidays)**.
- Vehicles should enter through the 'organisation entrance' of the service gate and present their permit obtained from SRAD/Mol in Amman and their passports of the visitors to the Syrian Refugees Affairs Directorate (SRAD) official personnel at the gate of the camp.
- A liaison officer from SRAD will be present at the entrance and may escort the visitors to the SRAD office to confirm permissions.
- **If there has been no prior arrangement with UNHCR, SRAD liaison officer will inform UNHCR camp management of the visit.**
- A briefing from SRAD and UNHCR Head of Office is available for all visitors – if needed and with prior arrangement.
- Visitors are kindly requested to observe instructions from SRAD and UNHCR representatives.
- **SRAD will provide an escort within the camp.**

- UNHCR staff will be accompanying all delegations throughout their visit in the camp.
- There is restricted access to the reception/new arrivals area.
- Photographs of the interior of any security compounds is prohibited, nor are any interviews of SRAD personnel without the express permission of SRAD in Amman. You can conduct an interview with the SRAD Camp Director or their deputy – but with prior arrangements and approvals.
- If you would like to visit an agency/organisation working in the camp, please ensure that this is requested prior to obtaining your permission.
- Visitors may be required to stop by the SRAD office prior to departing the camp at 15:00hrs.
- On leaving the camp, passports and permit should be shown to the SRAD official at the exit gate.
- UNHCR is not in a position to provide accommodation or transportation for any visitor to the camp.

Zaatari

Access to Zaatari

- Vehicles should enter through the main entrance and present the permit obtained from SRAD in Amman and visitors' passports to the Syrian Refugees Affairs Directorate (SRAD) official personnel at the gate of the camp.
- Visitors may be requested to head to SRAD office in the camp to confirm their permissions and should immediately proceed to the Base Camp where they will be a UNHCR representative welcoming them.
- If there has been no prior arrangement with UNHCR, SRAD will inform camp management of any media presence in the camp.
- A briefing from SRAD and UNHCR Head of Office is available for all media and visitors – with prior arrangements.
- Media are kindly requested to observe instructions from the SRAD and UNHCR representatives.
- There is no media access to the returnees' area unless arranged and approved beforehand by UNHCR.
- Photographs of the interior of any security compounds is not allowed, nor are any interviews of SRAD personnel (except the Camp Director or their deputy) without the express permission of SRAD in Amman.
- If you would like to visit an agency/organisation working in the camp, please ensure that this is requested prior to obtaining your permission.
- UNHCR is not in a position to provide accommodation or transportation.

For online updated statistics please visit the Syria Regional Response Information Sharing Portal:

<https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/syria/location/36> or: <https://www.unhcr.org/jo/>

Guidance for visitors in the camp

PI Materials

UNHCR will Provide UNHCR public information materials and updated statistics on persons of concern – if needed.

Interviewing asylum seekers and refugees

Respect privacy

Reception centres/refugee camps are the only private homes that refugees or asylum seekers have. Therefore be polite and respectful. Greet, ask permission and do not enter rooms/tents unless you are invited in.

Take your time and listen

Refugees are not our usual interview partners. They have dramatic and very personal experiences, and speaking about them may be a painful process. Give them time, listen, do not ask too many questions, rather give cues and let them decide on the speed and path of the tale.

Be sensitive

Torture, rape or witnessing death are traumatising experiences. Do not re-traumatise people by asking too direct questions. Rather talk to aid workers, doctors etc. if you need to know these details. They will provide you with accurate, albeit anonymous reports.

Appendix C: Participant Information Template

The title of the research project

Examining Entrepreneurship Agency within Constrained Institutional Contexts: A Comparative Case Study of Refugee Camp Entrepreneurship

Invitation paragraph

'You are being invited to take part in a research project. Before you decide it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve.

Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Ask us if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information.

Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part.'

What is the purpose of the project?

The purpose of this project is to examine the significance of entrepreneurship agency within constrained contexts.

Thus, by looking at two separate refugee camps, we are attempting to homogenise the role of institutions (i.e. structural element of institutions) with a view of exploring the heterogeneity of entrepreneurship between contexts/camps.

I am trying to understand how extreme contexts impact entrepreneurship agency, and how individuals/businesses overcome these restrictions. Through what strategies/mechanisms do they employ.

Why have I been chosen?

- a) You are a current/former refugee camp entrepreneur or have experience of engaging in entrepreneurial activities; or
- b) You have current/past experience working in a refugee camp for an NGO (non-governmental organisation) or the United Nations (i.e. UNHCR).

Do I have to take part?

'It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part you will be given this information sheet to keep (and to give verbal consent) and you can still withdraw at any time without it affecting any benefits that you are entitled to in any way. You do not have to give a reason.'

If in the advent any 'withdrawal' takes place post interview (and post the researcher's departure from camp/country) participants will be able to send an email (The researcher will present each interviewee with a business card with the relevant contact information).

Should the interviewee be uncomfortable to answer any particular question or questions (but are happy to proceed with the interview), then no probing will be conducted on the topic they refrained from.

What do I have to do?/ What will happen to me if I take part?

- Partake as an interviewee on the subject topic of refugee livelihood/entrepreneurship.
- The interview transcript will be anonymised, transcribed, and used for research purposes only.
- Provide consent (verbally) to be observed/photographed (participant discretion if they wished to be filmed)

What are the possible benefits of taking part?

There are no immediate benefits to taking part, however it is greatly appreciated to facilitate much needed research into refugee livelihoods, particularly within constrained contexts (i.e. refugee camps).

Use, dissemination and storage of research data

It is intended that this research will be academically published (i.e. made available to academic audiences, state actors and NGO's) for purposes relating to policy making conceptual theorisation (education purposes).

What will happen to my personal information?

Any personal information will be entirely anonymised/pseudonymised in the data collection and publication processes.

What will happen to the results of the research project?

'All the contact information that we collect about you during the course of the research will be kept strictly confidential and will stored separately from the research data. We will take steps wherever possible to anonymise the research data so that you will not be identified in any reports or publications'.

Given the importance of research data for the future the data collected during the course of this project may be used for additional or subsequent research.

What type of information will be sought from me and why is the collection of this information relevant for achieving the research project's objectives?

Who is organising/ funding the research?

Organiser: Yousef Qaisi (PhD researcher)

Funder: University of Leeds (PhD Fund/scholarship)

Contact for further information

Researcher: Yousef Qaisi

e bnyq@leeds.ac.uk | m +44 7861 688152

Supervisory team: Dr Deema Refai | e d.refai@leeds.ac.uk:

Prof Nick Williams | e n.e.williams@leeds.ac.uk**Additional question to include in an information sheet if the research involves producing recorded media:**

Will I be recorded, and how will the recorded media be used?

'The audio and/or video recordings of your activities (i.e. refugee entrepreneurs) made during this research will be used only for analysis and for illustration in conference presentations and lectures. No other use will be made of them without your written permission, and no one outside the project will be allowed access to the original recordings.'

Appendix D: Informed Consent Template

Consent to take part in: Examining Entrepreneurship Agency within Constrained Institutional Contexts: A Comparative Case Study of Refugee Camp Entrepreneurship	Add your initials next to the statement if you agree
I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet/letter explaining the above research project and I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the project.	
I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason and without there being any negative consequences. In addition, should I not wish to answer any particular question or questions, I am free to decline.	
I give permission for members of the research team to have access to my anonymised responses. I understand that my name will not be linked with the research materials, and I will not be identified or identifiable in the report or reports that result from the research. I understand that my responses will be kept strictly confidential.	
I agree for the data collected from me to be stored and used in relevant future research in an anonymised form	
I understand that other genuine researchers will have access to this data only if they agree to preserve the confidentiality of the information as requested in this form.	
I understand that other researchers may use my words in publications, reports, web pages, and other research outputs, only if they agree to preserve the confidentiality of the information as requested in this form.	
I understand that relevant sections of the data collected during the study, may be looked at by auditors from the University of Leeds where it is relevant to my taking part in this research. I give permission for these individuals to have access to my records.	
I agree to take part in the above research project and will inform the lead researcher should my contact details change during the project and, if necessary, afterwards.	

Name of participant	
Participant's signature	
Date	
Name of lead researcher	Yousef Qaisi

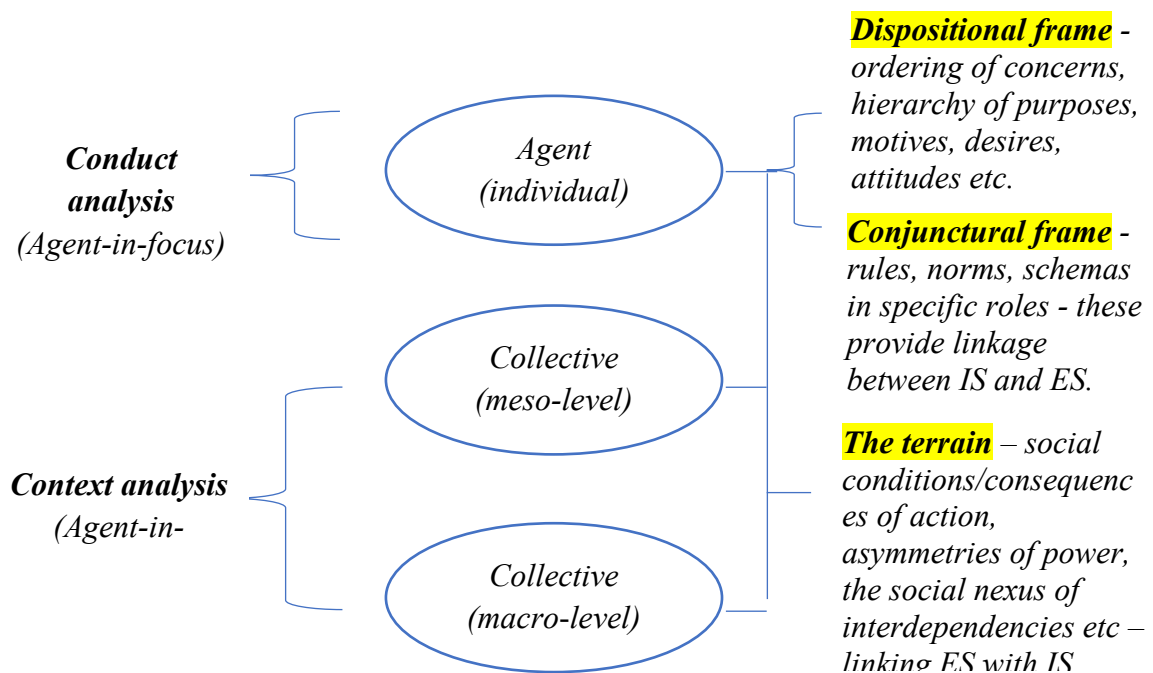
Signature	
Date*	

Once this has been signed by all parties the participant should receive a copy of the signed and dated participant consent form, the letter/ pre-written script/ information sheet and any other written information provided to the participants. A copy of the signed and dated consent form should be kept with the project's main documents which must be kept in a secure location.

Appendix E: Interview Guide

INTERVIEW GUIDE	Why?
Conduct analysis analyses internal knowledgeability on 2 levels : dispositional and conjunctural	
1. Introductory question(s): age, camp duration, type of business? 2. Why have you opted to set-up your own camp business? 3. What led you to identify this (particular) opportunity? 4. Did you operate your own business (i.e. country of origin) prior to encampment? 5. Can you explain your business start-up process? 6. Has it been an emotional journey?	<i>Ordering of concerns, purposes, motives, attitudes (Stones, 2005)</i>
Conjunctural frame – specific stocks of knowledge (applied) 1. How do/did you assess this business opportunity? (i.e. screening/selection process) 2. Why have you chosen to exclude other opportunities? (e.g. conventional employment or ‘other business opportunities’) 3. How do/did you perceive camp rules/regulations pertaining to your business operation? 4. What personal characteristics/resources do you feel are integral to the success/longevity of your business (i.e. skills, qualities, capital etc) 5. Has the emotion/adversity helped/hindered your business?	<i>How does the agent apply his contextual knowledge to the here and now?</i> How does the agent link his IS to ES (Kennedy et al., 2021) <i>Conjunctural specific structures are the hinge to ES (ibid.)</i>
Context analysis attempts to understand the conditions of action and links external structures (ES) to internal structures (IS) (‘Institutional analysis’ – Giddens, 1984) 1. What are the challenges of running a refugee camp business 2. How do you perceive this camp (business friendliness) compared to others in the region (i.e. Zaatari vs Azraq) 3. Do you feel one camp is better supported than the other, if so, why? 4. How do you perceive the camp demographic/composition? (Zaatari = predominately from Dara’a; Azraq = mixed population) 5. How do you perceive the geographical location of your camp? 6. Is this (population) a hindrance/facilitator to your business 7. How do you perceive the difference in market street architecture between camps (i.e. based on the assumption that refugees are wary of this – some may be unaware of the difference) 8. Has encampment made you more or less entrepreneurial? 9. Has the environment shaped/refined your skillset? 10. Is your business preventing you from repatriating to Syria? (<i>they’ve built a business/future and very much embedded into camp/host nation, perhaps a sense of achievement, stability...</i>) NB. Syria is considered to be somewhat stable now...	<i>The researcher is interpreting the involved actor’s own interpretation of their situation/terrain</i> (Stones, 2015) (double hermeneutic) <i>Context analysis involves linking the ES to the IS (‘connective tissue’) (Kennedy et al 2021)</i>
Interview questions for support agents	
1. What support do you provide to refugees – is it effective? 2. Is camp entrepreneurship important – do you support it? 3. What works well and what doesn’t work well in camps? 4. Why is the refugee composition between the Syrian refugee camps in Jordan different (i.e. Zaatari = Dar’aa district, Azraq = heterogeneous) 5. Has this (population mix) led to any challenges? 6. Have there been attempts to decentralise the Zaatari marketplace to replicate the Azraq model?	Asymmetries of power, social conditions, consequence of action – linking ES with IS

7. What were the main learnings from the Zaatari camp (pilot/first camp)? (i.e. mistakes/challenges etc) 8. What are the ‘support gaps’ in the camps? 9. What changes do you feel could be made to enhance/boost entrepreneurship 10. Which is the best camp design (Zaatari vs Azraq) for refugee agency and wellbeing 11. Why wasn’t the Zaatari model replicated if it’s considered to be an embodiment of agency/self-sufficiency? 12. Which camp is easier to govern/control? 13. How do these camps fare compared to other global refugee camps (i.e. based on the assumption the support works have experienced other camps).	



‘The connective tissue’ – **conduct & context analysis** (adapted from Kennedy-Reid, 2014; Kennedy et al, 2021; Feeney and Pierce, 2016)

Appendix F: Sample Transcript(s)

F1. Calais/Dunkirk

Interview Transcript: Volunteer Experience in Calais/Dunkirk [C-3] (40 minutes)

(No coding – just interview practice)

Background and Introduction

Interviewer:

My name is Yousef. I'm a second-year PhD doctoral student at the University of Leeds. My research examines how refugee agents, entrepreneurs, and individuals cope in constrained contexts such as refugee camps, and whether they have the autonomy to shape their respective contexts or environments. I'm looking at refugee camps in the Middle East and also conducting a pilot study in Calais, comparing the differences between a refugee camp in the so-called developed world against emerging economies. We met at Calais—I was only there for about five days. I remember you cycled down from Manchester. If you could give a brief introduction to yourself, I'll start the questions.

C-3:

I wanted to volunteer in Calais for a few years, but the opportunity hadn't arisen time-wise. I was doing a lot of work with Care for Calais in Manchester in the hotels while doing my master's, which was in socially engaged arts practice. The focus of my master's was how art could be used to challenge the hostile environment.

Initially, I thought I would explore the extent to which artisan or craft art that could be sold would provide migrant populations with dignity and income and help them escape the hostile environment they were likely to encounter as they travelled. That goes back to my experience of living in South America as an artisan with migrant communities.

However, my research focus changed over the year and ended up being about the experience of asylum seekers and refugees in this country and how we could challenge the hostile environment. This year I had the opportunity to go to Calais. I decided to raise some money and volunteer for two weeks. I raised £1,233 so far.

Interviewer:

Fantastic work!

C-3:

It's a drop in the ocean, isn't it? When you look at how much is spent daily just to keep Care for Calais going, I remember Imogen saying the warehouse stock I saw was only about 30 days' worth.

Services Provided by Care for Calais

Interviewer:

In your own words, what support did you provide to refugees in France with Care for Calais?

C-3:

Care for Calais offers a range of services. They're an organisation focused on mass distribution. They go out every day to different distribution sites—there aren't any refugee camps in Calais, only unauthorized settlements. Each day they offer services at different locations. Services include hot drinks and biscuits, phone charging ports (hundreds of them), bicycle maintenance, English lessons, and games like cricket, football, chess, and Connect Four. There's a sewing station where people can get their clothes fixed or make friendship bands. Then there's the hair station, which, although I found it boring to work on because you're not actively needed, I think is the most powerful in terms of agency and dignity.

Interviewer:

I agree completely.

C-3:

I liked handing out leaflets about the Rwanda scheme, even though it makes you the bearer of bad news. Although I may be a bit older than a lot of volunteers, I don't mind having difficult conversations. I think it's really important. It's so uplifting to see that the refugees living in Calais are so hopeful, but I know there are people who aren't. So I think it's important to arm them with information.

You can't give legal advice, but you can advise them of who to contact when they get to the UK. There was a legal consideration around that—Imogen and Chris were getting us to have refugees memorize the phone number because if you get detained, they take your phone and give you a basic phone. You don't have access to any of your contacts. If you're detained under the offshoring scheme, you're in real danger of being deported, and if you're in detention, no agencies can get to you and people don't know you're there. So you need to memorize the numbers and place yourself on the map.

What Worked Well and What Didn't

Interviewer:

From your experience, what worked well and what didn't work so well in terms of services or the operation?

C-3:

I think they've been refining their provision for a long time, so all the services are necessary. The hair station, though small, is quite incredible. There are a number of barbers or people with different skills from different communities who manage their own barber's chair. It's not a survival thing or a quick tidy-up.

I didn't expect them to spend 40 to 50 minutes on each person's hair and beard. This is real care—this is normal life. There were a couple of occasions when people had to wait too long. I don't really understand why they don't have more chairs and clippers. I never witnessed the blades being abused or anything being taken. I always feel they could have offered more chairs because there were occasions where people got really upset or angry because they never got their hair or beard done.

Interviewer:

I think they could have gotten wireless clippers instead of ones with cables. That would have made it leaner.

C-3:

That would be more likely to be stolen, I suppose. But I didn't see a culture of taking things—they could have taken anything we brought and they never did. So I don't think that culture was there. They could have had more stations for all the barbers to work from because it was such a valued service.

There was an eviction while I was there. We went out to distribute tents and sleeping bags, and it was really cold. People were desperate, and not everybody got a tent. What was heartbreaking was there was a 15-year-old boy from Afghanistan who I'd chatted with on a number of occasions. There was a miscommunication, and he didn't get anything. I think he should have been asked to stand with the families because although he didn't have family with him, he was a child, a minor.

I didn't see him again, and I hope he was one of those who got across successfully in the following days because there were a lot of successful crossings that week. I think that's why they did the eviction on the morning they did—as a response to the crossings.

Differences Between Distribution Sites

Interviewer:

What were the main differences between the BMX, the hospital, and the Dunkirk sites in your opinion?

C-3:

They are very different. BMX is almost exclusively Eritrean, and the atmosphere is always wonderfully positive. They live as one community. Because it's a rural settlement, they are the refugees who can't afford to pay the smugglers. They're probably looking for a lorry to break into or cling onto the bottom of.

Dunkirk is much farther from Dover—the crossing is much longer. But the Dunkirk coastline is far less surveilled than the Calais coastline. The Eritreans at BMX had a really strong community. They cooked together and had a kitchen tent. Because it's smaller and they're all from the same cultural background, there was real togetherness there.

In Calais, they give out food packs for four people at a time, which suggests people are living in units where they can cook in groups of four. In Dunkirk, food is packed for two people because people are much more dispersed—they're camping wherever they can find a little space.

In Dunkirk, when you turn left past the level crossing, there are loads of gazebos—they're like little shops. You don't get that in Calais. So there's more enterprise emerging in Dunkirk. There's also a lot more people there.

Refugee Livelihoods and Enterprise

Interviewer:

What is your perception of refugee livelihoods within these camps—enterprise, trading amongst themselves, working in the informal economy? Did you see any evidence of this?

C-3:

The people in Dunkirk or Calais looking to pay smugglers to cross on a boat have money. These are people who have some economic means. These are not the poorest refugees—the poorest refugees aren't making it past the neighboring countries. They must have some means.

When they do a crossing, they throw their phones away because they've been told not to have anything on them. I'm not sure that's wise advice—I think you're better off having as much evidence of your nationality, age, and everything as you can. But they don't take their phones with them. They have enough money to replace everything numerous times.

I met an amazing guy who lost everything when he was in a dinghy that capsized. He saves his money for paying for numerous crossings. He said he sees it like a game. I asked if he was scared, and he said it's whatever God wants. He said I wouldn't understand because I'm not religious. I'm not a religious person, but I feel like everyone deserves a better life. I wouldn't put it down to God's decision—I think everyone deserves to thrive and survive.

He had a 38-hour crossing on the Mediterranean—100 miles from Libya. As soon as Libya came up in conversation, people showed me scars and injuries from things that happened to them there. We should be helping more. We should be processing asylum cases at the point of fleeing, and then people should be dispersed according to where they've got contacts, language skills, and family. It shouldn't be that people have to take a life-threatening journey.

This guy had gotten separated from his mother crossing Libya. He was an adult, which means his mother is somewhere on her own. It's really heartbreaking. The enterprise comes in the self-starting mindset—'I can do this, I will survive, and I will start again.'

I didn't see enterprise in terms of trade, except for the barbering, but they weren't expecting any reward, financial or otherwise. That was purely for community service. The ability to serve others is fundamental to our mental health and wellbeing. Being the recipient of charity is

actually really bad for you. When people feel able to give something back to their community, that in itself is payment enough. It's about dignity and humanity, not money.

The Hair Station and Community Value

Interviewer:

I was fascinated with the haircut setup. Jamie, one of the volunteers, mentioned he felt the main barbers would get first priority at the charging stations or have a say in bike repairs—some form of informal exchange system.

C-3:

I'm not sure I agree with that. I remember one day when they were handing out hoodies or summer jackets, and the guys cutting hair said, 'No, I'm working,' and forwent all the other services. Being able to work—people need to do that. We do it all the time.

To have that value in the community itself is important. I never saw a shortage of charging ports—there were plenty. So I think that's a romantic idea, but I saw no evidence that it's true. I think they could have had more barber stations because it was such a valued service.

Comparison: France vs. Middle Eastern Camps

Interviewer:

How do you feel camps in France compare to camps in emerging economies such as Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, or Palestine? Would camps in France be better?

C-3:

No, I think there are official refugee camps in the Middle East. In France, we don't have refugee camps—it's a complete denial of the issue. You've got unauthorized settlements that are routinely destroyed, which is like pouring donations into landfill, but with a brief stopover where they're useful to somebody.

You said something that resonated with me—sometimes a sticking plaster isn't a bad thing. It's a requirement because it stops the injury from getting infected. But there's nothing we can do apart from provide a sticking plaster in this context.

BMX as a Unique Community Structure

C-3:

BMX is interesting because they have devised their own parameters that they feel confident sharing with outside agencies, whereas Dunkirk and Calais are more individualistic. The Eritrean community at BMX has more systems and infrastructures that support the idea of agency and enterprise. BMX is also the oldest settlement—it's been the longest standing one.

Conclusion and Future Plans

Interviewer:

Thank you very much. I really appreciate your time. I came back from Jordan a couple of weeks ago and managed to access one of the camps where I conducted about 20 interviews. I'll go back in December to access the next camp, and then it's just writing up next year in 2024.

C-3:

That's amazing! Good luck with the rest of your research. I have a friend who was a fellow but didn't complete his PhD—he was researching hope in refugee camps. It might be useful if I put you in contact with him.

Interviewer:

That would be great, particularly if he has camp access. Are you planning to go back to Calais?

C-3:

Definitely. I was thinking of going in October, actually, to see if they've got any vans to take over. It costs a lot of money—I probably spent about the same as I raised. I cycled there and stayed in hotels along the way.

Interviewer:

I spent nearly £900 in five days, and I was camping there as well. Everything is expensive now. To be honest, Care for Calais was the only organization where they granted access to these unauthorized settlements. It was also easier for insurance purposes to go with a charity organization because I had to go through ethics with my institution.

C-3:

That makes sense. The reason they didn't like the big Calais Jungle that was disbanded in 2016 was because it had its own businesses—it was a real ecosystem. BMX operates as a camp, as a community, and that's where their strength comes from. Your study would find that a very interesting setup to explore because there are more systems and infrastructures there that support agency and enterprise.

Interviewer:

Absolutely. Thank you again. We'll stay in touch, and I really appreciate your time and insights.

— *End of Interview* —

Interview Transcript: with (former) UN Urban Planner [UN-UP] (38 minutes)

First order expressions highted

Background & Introduction

Interviewer:

To give you a brief background, I'm a second-year PhD student at Leeds University. My project focuses on the Zaatari refugee camp in particular and examining the disparity between Zaatari and Azraq camps. I came across a blog post you wrote in 2016—I'm not sure how much of it remains relevant to the present situation. I'm planning to visit the camps if I can get permission from the Ministry of Interior.

I'm trying to understand whether the differences between the camps are due to refugee agency or structural issues. If you could give me an introduction to yourself and your current work with the UN, that would be helpful.

UN-UP:

You make a good point—I'm not sure what I wrote in 2016 is still relevant. If I haven't already put you in touch with people who work at UNHCR now, we can discuss that at the end. I still know someone who was working with me at the time and, as far as I know, is still with UNHCR. He would have more updated information on the current situation.

I currently work for the UN Development Program as part of a team called the Accelerator Lab. It's part of a network of 92 labs around the world in different UNDP country offices. The organization launched this network because they recognized they don't always have experts on emerging issues. COVID is one obvious example—no one knew what to do. There are many challenges now where you don't necessarily have an expert, unlike the technical problems UNDP is used to working with.

They launched this network to create space for people to model a different way of doing development with the flexibility to experiment, explore different data sources, and focus more on local grassroots solutions and what people are already doing. The main goal is accelerating learning—figuring out more quickly what works and what doesn't by building on what people are already doing, rather than the typical development approach of new programs that are pre-designed, often by people who either aren't from the country, aren't familiar with the context, or might be good in their technical area but don't understand the daily challenges faced by local people.

My role is Head of Solutions Mapping, which focuses on advocating for people who already have solutions for their own problems. I facilitate mapping exercises—sometimes mapping actual solutions to problems, but also mapping assets, resources, anything that could help us eventually get to a co-designed solution.

Comparison of Zaatari and Azraq Camps

Interviewer:

I'm approaching this from purely an economic and entrepreneurial perspective, not focusing on the humanitarian aspect. The Zaatari refugee camp has 1,800 registered businesses compared to 375 registered businesses in Azraq. I'm aware of the population disparity—Zaatari has approximately 80,000 people compared to Azraq's 40,000. What are your thoughts on these two contrasting ecosystems?

UN-UP:

Before I forget, do you want me to address your overarching research question about whether it's a difference in people or structure?

Interviewer:

Yes, please discuss that.

UN-UP:

This question is very much linked to that bigger picture. It doesn't surprise me. I think the way the two camps emerged has a lot to do with how much people were able to start their own businesses and exercise their agency. For me, when I was working there, a lot of the focus was on seeing how spatially people had agency, but it's the same principle.

The Emergence of Zaatari Camp

Zaatari emerged during the beginning of the crisis. While that had downsides—and it was really hard to manage, according to my colleagues who were there when it first opened—it also left people more vulnerable in some ways. Single women had it harder because there started to be dynamics of almost like mafias. Certain areas of the camp were controlled by certain people, most likely men, who asserted control.

I don't want to paint a rosy picture of the fact that it came together organically during the crisis. There was a lot that was challenging. But I think it allowed people to have space to shape their lives and exercise agency. Part of that was creating the market in Zaatari camp, which people in the development sector call the Champs-Élysées, although I've heard that people who actually live in the camp don't call it that.

That market happened because it was so messy and UNHCR didn't yet have the capacity to organize things. They were just trying to get people sheltered. Because of that, people created this market and set up their businesses. By the time the government and UNHCR caught up, it was too late. The market was already established—relatively speaking, it's still a camp, but people had created their space.

The Planning of Azraq Camp

Azraq camp, because it was pre-planned—and I joined when it was just starting to get planned—there was much more structure, not only in terms of physical infrastructure but also in terms of rules and procedures. UNHCR had more room to put structures in place for everything: housing, movement procedures, registration, house numbers, who lives where.

The market itself took quite a while to open up. I left UNHCR in 2015, and I think it was maybe two years later that the markets finally opened, although the markets were built or being built

when I left. There was a lot of management-level conversation about how to manage the market. They were discussing whether it would be shared with Jordanians.

The last thing I remember—and you'd have to confirm this—is they ended up doing a system where every kiosk and every business had to be co-owned by a Jordanian and a Syrian. That was part of trying to deal with frustrations some Jordanians were having, especially those around Azraq camp, who felt refugees were taking jobs or that all the money was going to the camps while they were also struggling.

There was much more time that went into deciding when to open the market, how to open it, how to manage kiosks, and how to distribute them to people. The physical infrastructure was also very different from Zaatari, very structured. All of this—I know I'm talking a lot spatially because that's what I worked on—is related to the fact that there may be fewer businesses because there are more rules around how they open and run their businesses. Maybe people are discouraged.

In Zaatari, people not only created the marketplace, they actually built it. They took the containers that were being distributed and shaped them as they wanted. They put them in the places they wanted. In Azraq camp, there's a fixed marketplace with fixed kiosks of fixed sizes, and you have to work within that structure, which is quite a lot of structure.

I wonder if there's a correlation between the fact that there's much more structure—whether physical or rules—around these markets, which caused fewer businesses to open up. It's more of a question and a suspicion than a firm conclusion.

Spatial Layout and Design Differences

Interviewer:

Looking at maps from 2014, Zaatari shows these districts and lines—I think this is the Champs-Élysées strip. In this corner, you have different types of businesses: supermarket, grocery, clothes, bakery, butcher, restaurant. The shops line the street and districts.

In comparison, Azraq has these isolated ecosystems—Village 2, Village 3, and so on—with highlighted sections that are the actual marketplaces. Are people in Village 3 able to walk to Village 6 and visit that marketplace, or are they completely segregated?

UN-UP:

For background on why this happened—and I'm not justifying or defending it, just explaining, because I now have questions about whether this was the right planning decision—the idea of Azraq camp being designed that way came from a document everyone was talking about when I first joined: 'Lessons Learned from Zaatari Camp.'

One of the biggest issues, especially for the government, was that Zaatari felt too centralized, too difficult to manage and monitor. This led to the idea of decentralization, creating these villages that were supposed to function independently, almost like self-sufficient villages. Each had its own school, services, market, etc.

In Azraq camp, there are big roads that go through the villages, whereas in Zaatari, there's only a big ring road that goes around with smaller roads in between. In Azraq, this was part of

focusing on the ability for cars to go through—cars for development aid and government security.

People can go from market to market. I remember a few years ago, I was in the camp talking to a woman who was walking through a market to get to a hospital. She had crossed between villages—I don't know how far, but the camp is huge and very hot with very little shaded area between the villages. She was walking from one village to another because there was a service she wanted to access that wasn't in her village.

The villages aren't closed off from each other, except for Village 5. There was one particular village that was actually fenced off from the rest. It was the village where they would put people if they had suspicions about their backgrounds or they were still going through security or background checks. But the rest of the camp was open, so people could go from market to market.

I'm pretty sure I had conversations with refugees who said they did go outside the village they lived in to another market because that market had goods they didn't find in their own village. So it didn't end up being what was intended in theory—that people could stay in their villages, not have to walk far, and be fine with their area. People are walking long distances and going where they feel they can get what they need.

Interviewer:

Just from the visual itself, Zaatari looks much more interconnected and fluid.

UN-UP:

Yes, definitely. That's due to the fact that people were moving things themselves. If it's helpful, there is research from an architectural and planning perspective about how spatially the two camps are different, or at least focusing on Zaatari.

Planning Process and Key Figures

Interviewer:

I've come across some academics—Alexandra Betts and Paul Collier—who seem to have consulted with the Jordanian government on the refugee camps. Do you know if there were external consultants brought in, or was the planning purely internal with Jordanians working on it?

UN-UP:

It wasn't just Jordanians. One person I know was the mastermind behind the camp, or at least one of the two main people. His name was Werner Schellenberg. He was German and had been working for UNHCR for many years. He passed away last year, unfortunately, so you wouldn't be able to talk to him. If he were still with us, he would have a wealth of information on everything about Azraq and Zaatari.

He has a website that his close friends have been working on to document his life since he passed. I'll send you that. He was my direct supervisor and the main person running the planning and design of the transitional shelter and overall planning.

There may have been one other person—I didn't meet them and can't remember the name—who I used to hear about. Someone else, not Jordanian, I think European, but I don't know which country, or possibly Australian. That person may have had some input into early sketches. Actually, that was for Zaatari specifically. I think there was someone who tried to put some structure into Zaatari, but in reality, the plan wasn't implemented because of how messy it was.

For Azraq, Werner Schellenberg was definitely the one in charge of the planning unit. He was the one who had the idea of decentralized villages. He came up with the idea of a transitional shelter that was supposed to be able to be taken apart and set back up somewhere else, theoretically. He was really the mastermind behind it.

Sadly, Werner passed very quickly from COVID. He was in his 80s but was in great health. His daughter sent out an email describing how he got sick and it deteriorated very fast. It was shocking and very sad. COVID is weird that way.

Demographics and Entrepreneurial Characteristics

Interviewer:

Looking at the UNHCR website, about 80% of the Zaatari refugee camp population is from Daraa, Syria. The Azraq refugee camp has more of a split between different districts in Syria. Is there anything distinct about this group of people in terms of their spirit of entrepreneurship?

UN-UP:

By the way, I use the term 'mafia' not as formal mafia, but that's what people kind of described it as—like gangs. To answer your question, I haven't heard people specifically say that people from Daraa are particularly entrepreneurial. I would hear a lot about people saying that Syrians in the camps are very entrepreneurial.

I think it might be a combination—it could be that there's something about Syrians that's entrepreneurial, but I think also partly it's circumstance. There's a saying in Arabic: 'al-haja umm al-ikhtirar'—need is the mother of invention. This circumstance, the fact that people needed to survive, and the different backgrounds people came from.

While Zaatari statistically has many people from Daraa, people in the two camps come from different parts of Syria. Some could have been farmers previously, businessmen, academics. There's a mix of different backgrounds—urbanites, people from towns or villages, others who lived a Bedouin lifestyle and moved around. That's the kind of information I've heard. But I don't know if specifically people from Daraa have an entrepreneurial character.

Additional Contacts and Resources

UN-UP:

There are a few people I can connect you with who might be helpful:

1. Tala – still works for UNHCR as far as I know. He's a very nice guy and I think he might be open to speaking.

2. Two of my colleagues at UNDP – they used to be my colleagues at UNHCR working on the same planning team. They haven't been working on the camps in years, but they have firsthand experience visiting the camps.
3. Irene – I haven't been in touch with her in a long time, so I don't know if she will reply, but she used to be the camp manager of Zaatari for a very long time.
4. A young man whose name I think was Yasser – this was actually a refugee who was living in Village 5. He was a really nice guy and at one point was running or trying to run a time bank in Village 5.

Time Bank Initiative

Interviewer:

What's a time bank?

UN-UP:

A time bank is based on the principle of exchanging goods for goods or services for services, rather than exchanging money for goods. This young man was trying to find a way for people to help each other within Village 5 or coordinate with people in other villages—to create a system where people could provide services to each other without money. For example, you cut my hair, I'll fix your sink. Each person contributes whatever skills they have.

Unfortunately, it didn't go anywhere. I wasn't part of the people trying to help them set this up, but I heard that UNHCR or the security or government were not pleased with this idea. I don't know the whole story—some things you hear as rumors and never really know if they're 100% true. But I heard it didn't go anywhere because they didn't like the idea.

Interviewer:

That's strange because I thought they'd want the refugees to be self-sufficient and empowered and have autonomy.

UN-UP:

You'd think that, like you said, they'd want refugees to be empowered, but there's more politics involved in this kind of work than you'd think before you go into it. I think maybe part of the fear was: what would that mean for the services that the NGOs were supposed to be providing? Are refugees not going to need them? There needs to be some level of dependency, sadly.

Conclusion

Interviewer:

Thank you very much. I really appreciate your time and all the emails back and forth. If you think of anyone else I could interview who has firsthand, on-the-ground experience, that would be a great help. I'll be there in Jordan in the summer, hoping to get past the gatekeepers.

I'll send you the informed consent form to sign. Everything will be anonymized—no one will be mentioned specifically in the research. The video is just for my reference for transcription purposes. I won't be sharing any videos, particularly with your position at the UN.

UN-UP:

I'll see who replies and says they'd be willing to talk. If I think of anyone else, I'll let you know.
Good luck with your research.

— *End of Interview* —

F3. Azraq

Interview Transcript: RE2-A

First order expressions highlighted

Restaurant Owner, Azraq Refugee Camp | Translated from Arabic (MSA) (20 minutes)



Summary

Refugee entrepreneur: RE2-A

Origin: Damascus

Business Type: Falafel Restaurant

Year Est: 2016

Previous experience: Supermarket owner

Introduction and Research Context

Researcher:

Let me explain the purpose of our visit. I'm a doctoral student in my second year of PhD studies. I'm researching how businesses operate in refugee camps and comparing conditions with what entrepreneurs had before in Syria. I'm comparing the Azraq and Zaatari camps, and I've also visited a refugee camp in France. I'm observing how people who leave Syria or their home countries and arrive in camps develop a new mindset—a business mentality—and how they generate income. This is the focus of my study.

I'd like to ask you some questions. Did you have work in Syria?

Background: Life Before the Camp

RE2-A:

In Syria, I owned a supermarket. I also lived in Greece for about ten years.

Researcher:

Was that before or after the war?

RE2-A:

Before the war. I've been here in Jordan since 2014. When the events started, we came to Jordan, to Azraq specifically. We've been here ever since.

Researcher:

Did you open your business as soon as you arrived?

RE2-A:

After about a year and a half or two years in the camp. The municipality distributed shop units, and my application was approved. I got allocated a shop unit and I'm still here.

Business Partnership and Operations

Researcher:

Did you have a business partner?

RE2-A:

Yes, I partnered with someone in this shop, but it was just for work purposes. He stayed with me for about eight months to two years, then he left a long time ago.

Researcher:

Is he still in the camp?

RE2-A:

No, he left.

Researcher:

Did you have any problems with him?

RE2-A:

No, it's not in my nature to have problems. Throughout my entire life, I might have upset one person or maybe I don't upset anyone at all. May God bless you. Circumstances in life teach you how to work in a way that's good and profitable, so you can help your family. When we came here, I arrived with just the pants I was wearing—we had nothing with us, nothing at all.

It was me and my children, seven of us. We arrived in a very difficult situation. We were exhausted, and the camp conditions were exhausting. You're living in caravans.

Life in Syria vs. Life in the Camp

RE2-A:

We used to live in Damascus, in the Damascus countryside. I had a house there, thank God, and my situation was going well.

Researcher:

So you had a house and a shop?

RE2-A:

Yes. When we came here, we had nothing—zero. We started from scratch. I started thinking about what work would suit me, and then I opened this shop.

Business Strategy and Philosophy

Researcher:

Why did you choose this type of business specifically? Why did you choose a restaurant?

RE2-A:

Honestly, the idea is this: here, you can go without clothes for a year, a month, or two months, but you can't go without food when you're hungry. You can't do without food—you must eat to be able to function. People can't do without food. Everyone comes to us because we're the best shop.

Researcher:

But what distinguishes you from others?

RE2-A:

What I've developed is an approach that I've made part of my nature. First, I have a strategy in my mind that I work to succeed. The first principle is that I absolutely do not cheat—no cheating whatsoever. Second, I treat all customers equally. There's no discrimination. Anyone who comes to me, I don't upset them. I might make you a sandwich that I actually lose money on, but I won't upset you. I accommodate your needs and ensure you're satisfied. The food, the food...

Customer Service Approach

Researcher:

Last week we were in downtown Amman at Hashem Restaurant—you might know it. I was eating a bowl of foul and found a stone in it. If the same thing happened in your shop, how would you deal with the customer?

RE2-A:

If there's something wrong, these are mistakes that can happen—they can even happen in your own home. I would apologize immediately and replace it for him right away. The most important thing is not to let him leave upset. The most important thing is that he's satisfied. I need to do this work properly because this is what feeds me and my children. So I must be clean in my work. Even if you didn't see the food being prepared, I work the same way inside.

Role of Faith in Business

Researcher:

Does your religion give you guidelines or instructions on how to run your business?

RE2-A:

I'm a Muslim, praise be to God. First, thank God, I don't cheat. Second, anything I do, I do it in a way that pleases God Almighty. I would never cheat. If something contradicts my humanity or my religion, I won't do it, no matter what. Thank God, I'm committed to this, and this encourages me because God Almighty continues to grant me success.

We're in a very difficult situation here. I see many shops opening and closing, but I'm still working. My wife and I went on Hajj, and people were surprised—how could I afford it given that our situation is difficult? But thank God, God provides for me. I don't just earn money and keep it. I spend on my children's education.

Costs and Operations

Researcher:

Do you pay rent for the shop?

RE2-A:

The municipality shop doesn't require payment except for services when I applied for it. I didn't pay much—just a nominal fee. In the past, we used to pay 40 dinars annually to the municipality, just as a formality because they don't give us official licenses for services. But when COVID came, they cancelled it. It's been 4-5 years since we've paid anything.

Researcher:

Could you open another shop?

RE2-A:

I've been offered to open shops in all the villages here, but there's no reliable workforce. You need someone you can depend on who's good at the work. I have five people working here, and I'm the sixth. Five people benefit from this shop.

Researcher:

Are they from your family?

RE2-A:

My son helps me today, and there's a young man from outside who helps me too. But it's not easy to open another shop because of the management aspect. You need to be present. Life and work teach you experience, teach you how to deal with people, and how to benefit from people's experience. The people who came in the past five years—very few of them work out. You find one good person among many. You find people who are dishonest, people who lie, people who steal money from shops. We've seen this, and it's happened to me many times.

Camp Geography and Delivery Services

Researcher:

In the camp situation here, it's not like outside. For example, someone from Village 6 might come to Village 2 to get food. That's far, isn't it?

RE2-A:

Yes, it's far. It's about three or four kilometers. Yes, their children tell them they won't eat except from here. I tell them I'll open a shop there, but it's difficult. You need to be present.

Researcher:

Do you have bicycles for delivery here?

RE2-A:

Yes, we deliver.

Researcher:

Do you charge for delivery?

RE2-A:

No, delivery is free. Our situation here is difficult.

Researcher:

Is there a minimum order requirement?

RE2-A:

No, any order. We deliver anything. It's not a financial issue—it's a service.

Online Presence and Marketing

Researcher:

I'm asking because I've seen Google reviews. Azraq does have the Google review system. In Zaatari, we saw shops with Google ratings. Do you have the same thing here?

RE2-A:

There are shops on Google with ratings. People can rate you. I know about it, but I haven't set it up myself. Why? Because I don't have time. I come here at 4 AM and work until evening prayers. By then I'm very tired. I go home, rest a bit. I don't even have time to think about adding things like that to help my business.

Researcher:

Shadi (police officer) suggested that if you want to help your business so that foreigners who visit can find you, it would be better to add it.

RE2-A:

Here in the camp, all the people who come are limited. They come through security, through Mr. Shadi, through the commissioner, through organizations. They're all known, and I'm known to them. My shop is known to them.

Why Not Return to Syria

Researcher:

If you'll allow me to ask, people are returning to Syria, correct? Why are you still here? Some people are returning, aren't they?

RE2-A:

First of all, in 2006, security forces detained me without any reason. I was in Syria. They beat me severely for no reason—just like that. I spent 18 days in detention in a dark room with about 40 other people.

Psychologically, how can I explain it to you? In the past, I lived in Greece, I went to Cyprus, I went to many foreign or Arab countries. If I found a mouse or something, I couldn't harm it. But when I went inside... I can tell you the matter was trivial. I was subjected to humiliation and severe fear and terror. After I got out, I realized that our country is like this—it's an empty thing. Someone young comes and beats you or steps on your head with his foot. Your psychology is affected.

When the events in Syria happened, I distanced myself. Even if I knew someone was with the other side, I stayed away from them. Now, if you want me to go back to Syria, I haven't caused any problems at all—I have no problems. But I developed a psychological condition. I'm afraid of this person at the checkpoint. It's a fear, a terror.

Now, if I go back to Syria, what am I going to do there? The situation is exhausting. Even the security situation—there's no food, there's no work. We're from Damascus countryside, about ten kilometers from the center, from the Mezzeh area.

Researcher:

So the situation here is better?

RE2-A:

No, it's not better. Now my children have grown up in the camps. This eldest one is 24 years old. I have a daughter who two years ago scored 93% in scientific stream. Masha'Allah. This year, another daughter of mine also got 94%.

Researcher:

Masha'Allah! May God bless you.

Children's Education and Future

RE2-A:

What do we do with them? There's nothing. They can't afford university. I enrolled one of them in pharmacy last year. Is there financial assistance? No, there isn't. The one who just got 94% two or three days ago—yesterday I took her with her sister to Salaam Pharmacy College. I took her to Zarqa University. We're paying in installments for her older sister in pharmacy.

On the way back, she started crying. She asked me, 'When will I enter university?' I told her, 'I swear to God, I don't have the resources to enroll both of you together. I enrolled one only.' Our situation is difficult, but when a Jordanian gets grades like this—94% or a high average—first of all, we're Syrian by nature, and I don't know about Jordan. For me regarding Jordan, this girl doesn't sleep—she studies constantly. It's difficult.

Tomorrow or the next day, she'll get married and everything will be gone. It's a problem. Our situation is different. Now, I'm telling you, for example, I have money, I'm working. I'm working, but I'm not happy. Why? Because my children—I came here for them. They're smart. If someone isn't smart or talented, fine, you'd say okay, that's it. But when you see them like this, on the verge of becoming brilliant, it's crushing.

Closing

Researcher:

We'll come back if God wills. Welcome anytime.

RE2-A:

How about you break your fast with us? I'll make lunch at home. You can have lunch with us, God willing.

Researcher:

That's very kind of you. May God give you wellness. Thank you.

— *End of Interview* —

F4. Zaatari

Interview Transcript: RE17-Z
First order expressions highlighted

Bakery Owner, Zaatari Refugee Camp | Translated from Arabic (MSA) (17 minutes)



Summary:

Refugee entrepreneur: RE17-Z

Origin: Daraa

Business type: Pastry shop

Year Est: 2014

Previous experience: Bakery

Introduction and Background

Researcher:

Please introduce yourself.

RE17-Z:

My name is QA

Researcher:

Al-Hariri? We've met several people with the surname Hariri here.

RE17-Z:

Hariri families are everywhere—in Egypt, Iraq, even Jordan.

Researcher:

Are you from Daraa?

RE17-Z:

Yes, I'm from Daraa.

Researcher:

Masha'Allah, most of the people here are from Daraa.

RE17-Z:

The vast majority are from Daraa because the region is on the border between Jordan and Syria.

Researcher:

But those who open shops—are they all from Daraa?

RE17-Z:

It's not a standard measure. They're the majority, but it's not universal. However, they are the majority. But the people of Daraa are talented. Syrians in general are talented in these businesses.

Researcher:

How old are you?

RE17-Z:

I'm about 55 or 56 years old. May you live long.

Researcher:

When did you come here?

RE17-Z:

We came in 2012.

Researcher:

Masha'Allah, all of you remember the dates exactly.

RE17-Z:

This is a date that can't be forgotten. This date is impossible for anyone to forget because it's like the displacement that happened to our Palestinian brothers. Praise be to God in all circumstances.

Life Before the Camp

Researcher:

Before you came to Jordan, what work were you doing in Syria?

RE17-Z:

We were working in the same business—the same type of shop. When we came here and the camp was established... Of course, at that time the camp wasn't like this. It wasn't in this form or this appearance. It was all tents at the beginning. In the beginning, we worked at whatever was available—whatever work there was, we would do it. But when the camp was established and things were organized, we tried to return to our original business.

Early Days in the Camp

Researcher:

So this was your business—baking.

RE17-Z:

Yes. At that time, the population here was massive. From 2012 through 2013, by the maximum of 2014, things were organized in the camp, praise be to God, in terms of shops and commercial establishments.

Researcher:

When you first arrived in 2012, did you open this shop?

RE17-Z:

No, we worked as laborers at first because we didn't own anything. I want you to understand—I want to understand the stages of development that got you to this shop. So first, when you arrived, you were a laborer.

Researcher:

Then you worked as a laborer?

RE17-Z:

We worked as regular laborers outside the camp. Outside, in olive groves, on farms, and so on—whatever work was available so you could secure a living. Of course, you have a family.

Researcher:

Do you have a family? How many family members?

RE17-Z:

I have a costly family—seven or eight members. Blessings upon the Prophet Muhammad. I have three boys and two girls. May God protect them for you.

Building the Business

Researcher:

So what I understand from you is that when you first arrived, you worked as a laborer outside the camp. Then gradually...

RE17-Z:

When we came here to the camp, all the children were small. They grew up here. How long have we been here? About 12 or 13 years now.

Researcher:

How old was your eldest when you arrived?

RE17-Z:

Ten years old. He was raised here. He doesn't know Syria. He doesn't remember—I truly don't know Syria. Correct, he doesn't remember. So you had to provide for this family and this household. We can't just sleep—we need to sit down, we need to eat. Of course. So I was forced to work outside. I was forced to work outside—I worked in construction, I worked on farms, I worked in olive groves. The important thing was to secure a living. Of course, you know life is difficult. Life isn't easy to this degree.

Researcher:

How did you reach the stage where you established this shop? Masha'Allah, it's considered a large shop.

RE17-Z:

We didn't establish the shop at first. First, you would reserve a corner—you'd reserve a small corner. You'd put up a tent or an awning. At first, I had a small shop. I stayed for a long time in that small shop until your affairs were organized, until you worked and made something and struggled, until you had some money saved up. Then I bought this one. I purchased it.

Researcher:

You purchased this shop?

RE17-Z:

I bought the shop, yes. I bought it as a purchase.

Researcher:

Do you still own that first small shop too?

RE17-Z:

No, no.

Researcher:

Can you sell a shop for profit, or how do shop sales work?

RE17-Z:

Here there's no buying or selling, no partnership or purchase, no buying or witnessing—only agreements between you and a specific person. But you don't have the legal right to buy and sell. No, the law here doesn't allow you because you're a refugee. Is that correct?

Business Development and Aspirations

Researcher:

Masha'Allah, so from the time you arrived, you worked outside to secure a living, then gradually you took a shop, then the shop grew into this shop here. What are the characteristics—what things can you add to your project more and more so that it improves further?

RE17-Z:

Here in the camp, you don't have ambitions beyond this, except if you go outside. Do you see? To go outside requires—it costs money. There are things that are required of you for you to be able to open a shop outside.

Researcher:

Like what things, for example?

RE17-Z:

It's possible that because you're a refugee, you can't open a shop outside. You can only work as a laborer. But if you want to work, you need to have an amount of money that you put as an investment in the bank, for example. They give you an investor certificate, as far as I know, and then you can open a shop. Of course. But in this form, where you're a refugee and you work and open a shop outside, it's a bit difficult.

Impact of War and Psychological Effects

Researcher:

We chose to interview you instead of your son because perhaps your son was ten years old in Syria—he doesn't remember the events much. Does your psychological state from the war that happened in Syria affect your current work in the camp?

RE17-Z:

Any war in the world, any war in the world, affects the big and the small, affects the financial situation, the psychological situation, the family situation—everything is affected. Of course,

even education. For example, in Syria my children were among the top students in schools. Masha'Allah. I have a son who graduated with an engineering degree. Masha'Allah, he graduated with engineering here.

Researcher:
Masha'Allah!

RE17-Z:
Currently he's working as a laborer outside. He used to help me with his studies—he would help me with work in addition to his studies, Masha'Allah, and he helped me with this work.

Labor and Family Support

Researcher:
Why don't you have workers? I mean, can't you bring workers from outside?

RE17-Z:
Because, don't you see, we're sitting here. Those who help you are all your children.

Researcher:
Just your children?

Business Challenges

Researcher:
What are the difficulties you face as a project owner in managing your project in the camp? Of course, every commercial establishment has difficulties it faces. If these difficulties weren't there, it might be better for it.

RE17-Z:
For example, securing materials. Securing materials—do you have distributors here in the camp?

Researcher:
They come from outside?

RE17-Z:
There are shops specialized in distribution. When you come as a shop owner wanting to buy a commodity, that commodity might cost one dinar. By the time it reaches here, it doesn't reach me until it's become four. Price inflation—there's inflation in prices.

Researcher:
So there's inflation in prices?

RE17-Z:

There's inflation in prices. There's inflation. These materials that we use—there's inflation. Inflation exists. We're essentially exchanging currency here. Currency exchange, but you can't carry large amounts in your pocket. You live day by day because people originally don't have much money. Because of the aid and all that, there isn't... There are hungry people. There are people with means—people who came from Syria with money originally. They came with capital already. Do you see?

Researcher:

Because they had businesses and land and such, and they came with money?

RE17-Z:

Those who came with money organized their affairs, opened businesses outside, lived outside. Those who didn't have money stayed here, worked, and persevered for themselves until they reached this level. Praise be to God, my lord. Praise be to God, Lord of the Worlds.

Comparison: Azraq vs. Zaatari Camp Structure

Researcher:

We were in Azraq camp—if you've heard of it, though you haven't been there. Azraq camp has villages, each village with its own market. We came here and were surprised to find that everything is open—all the market is on one street. Isn't that better in your opinion? Why?

RE17-Z:

I don't know anything about Azraq camp—I really don't know. But the village—is it isolated from the other village? Somewhat isolated. As long as it's isolated, there must be a market there. But here, the whole camp is open to itself. That's why the market is in a specific area. In this distance, these are the commercial shops.

Researcher:

Is this street better or that street better?

RE17-Z:

It's all the same because it's an extension. It's an extension.

Researcher:

Do you feel there's more activity on one street?

RE17-Z:

By God, I see them all because they're residential clusters. Residential clusters. The people up there need a car to come to me. There's a shop there—the same shop. Will they come to me or go there? They're walking fifty meters. And those who walk three kilometers...

Researcher:

That's true, correct?

RE17-Z:

Or should we charge them a dinar—a dinar to go and a dinar to return? No, I take from the location where I am because there's a residential cluster here, a residential cluster there, because there are sectors.

Competitive Advantage and Market Position

Researcher:

Are your prices considered competitive in the market?

RE17-Z:

The prices are approximately the same—one price here. The prices are one, but for me, I'm among the first people who opened a bakery here in the camp. Of course, the shop has regular customers—it has customers. But we're among the first.

Researcher:

We saw on the other street there's also someone from the Hariri family who opened a bakery. Is he related to you?

RE17-Z:

By God, for bakeries, the majority are Beit Hariri—the Hariri family. If you go up, you'll encounter several. Those who've acquired the craft, the profession, are from Daraa—most of them. This is not unique. Look, for Daraa governorate, Daraa governorate, you'll find various things there, but the level of culture is normal. The level of culture is normal—normal compared to Syria. The level of culture is normal.

For example, they might distribute doctors from Daraa governorate, distribute doctors to all Arab countries. And at the same time, they're shop owners, commercial establishments. At the same time, they have other businesses. You might be a school teacher, for example, but on the side you have land. After your shift, you go work on it. You have a business—you open it after your school shift. Even if someone has a degree, they still must have a business.

Researcher:

Why? What's the reason?

RE17-Z:

The proverb says—I don't know how it goes—the craft... If it doesn't feed you, you work. Right? From my principle.

Client Base and Pricing

Researcher:

I want to ask you—the shop we visited up there distributed to organizations. Do you have the same thing? Do you have organization clients?

RE17-Z:

Organizations—the security center distributes to them, the community police, hospitals, schools, other locations. Your reliance on work is between shops and organizations.

Researcher:

Do you have regular customers?

RE17-Z:

For us, the morning period is for organizations, schools, hospitals—whoever orders from us. Do you have regular customers? Yes.

Researcher:

Who determines the price? Do your customers determine the price, or you, or the market?

RE17-Z:

Look, here the price is different from the price outside the camp. We make the piece for a quarter dinar. Outside it's a dinar and a half. Outside it's a dinar and a half. We make it for a quarter.

Researcher:

You determined the prices? You in the camp determined the prices?

RE17-Z:

Look, because you don't pay shop rent, you don't pay shop rent. You don't have other obligations. You don't have a license, you don't have this or that. This matter makes it easier for you. It makes it easier, correct? The only cost is... But outside they have licenses, they have electricity, they have... Of course, we've installed solar panels for the shop, God willing. I brought solar panels because you don't have goods in refrigerators. You have meat, you have goods you need to preserve.

Researcher:

You don't pay for electricity originally?

RE17-Z:

Here we pay for electricity, but it comes at certain times and cuts off at certain times. We're currently running. The electricity comes—it comes at nine o'clock, twelve o'clock, it cuts off at three. We work on solar power from three until five, for example, until the electricity comes. Until five, I don't know. These days they cut it off a lot. During this period there's pressure on the electricity.

Operating Hours and Services

Researcher:

Have you finished work for the day or are you still working?

RE17-Z:

We stay until eight at night.

Researcher:

So now you're considered to be on a break period?

RE17-Z:

No, not a break. Any customer who comes, I want to serve them. If there's a customer, of course we have delivery too. We have delivery.

Researcher:

Delivery is available?

RE17-Z:

Delivery is available. Free delivery? Yes, free.

Marketing and Seasonal Business

Researcher:

Do you display your products on any social media platforms—Facebook, Instagram? Do you try to promote them on WhatsApp groups?

RE17-Z:

We have a mobile phone, we have WhatsApp, and we can display on it. But we're well-known here—the shop is known by customers.

Researcher:

When do you feel business is better—winter or summer?

RE17-Z:

The best is Ramadan. I'm still going to tell you—Ramadan is the season. Ramadan is distinctive in this. You know people are fasting—they prefer to take ready-made food. The month of goodness and blessings—it's the month of goodness and blessings. There's more activity, more activity. Praise be to God. But in normal circumstances, the activity is simple. It's what you see. It's been maybe a quarter hour, half an hour—no customer has come. A customer might come and compensate you for everything. Of course, this is sustenance from the Lord of the Worlds. Praise be to God. We're open and we say, 'O Lord.' Praise be to God.

Closing

Researcher:

We've taken enough of your time. Thank you so much.

RE17-Z:

Please stay. Let us offer you something.

Researcher:

By God, thank you so much. Thank you.

— *End of Interview* —

F5. Fieldnotes / Research Diary

Research Diary

Field Notes and Observations (excerpts)

Calais, France | Azraq, Jordan | Zaatari, Jordan

This research diary documents fieldwork conducted across three refugee camp sites as part of a PhD study examining refugee agency, entrepreneurship, and livelihoods in constrained contexts. The diary follows a chronological structure, beginning with observations in Calais, France (July 2023), followed by fieldwork in Azraq, Jordan (August 2023), and concluding with research in Zaatari, Jordan (December 2023).

Each entry includes contextual information about the research site, methodological notes, key observations, and reflections on the research process. These field notes serve as a critical companion to the formal interview data and provide insight into the lived experiences and operational realities of refugee camps across different geographical and political contexts.

Part I: Calais, France

July 2023

Tuesday, 25 July 2023

Location: Hospital Camp, Calais | Organisation: Care for Calais

Morning Activities: Preparation and Briefing

The day began with a debrief session for new volunteers. This session reinforced rules and regulations, covered safeguarding protocols, and outlined the operational terms and conditions for Care for Calais. Key points included:

- Requirement to wear Care for Calais overalls on-site for insurance purposes
- Synopsis of the day's planned activities
- Group assignments for various service roles

I was assigned to the services group. Our responsibilities included:

- Cleaning portable camping chairs for distribution site use
- Cleaning electric charging boards (mobile phone charging ports)
- Cleaning hair clippers
- Cleaning tables
- Filling two generators with petrol to power the distribution site

Note on power infrastructure: The generators provide electricity for all charging ports, hair clippers, and other electrical equipment at the distribution site. This infrastructure is essential for maintaining basic services that support refugee dignity and communication needs.

Midday: Community Lunch

Lunch was prepared by three volunteers working with a budget of €30. They purchased ingredients from a local supermarket and prepared a home-cooked meal that catered to 32 people. This demonstrated the resourcefulness required in volunteer operations and the importance of community meal-sharing in maintaining volunteer morale and cohesion.

Afternoon: Hospital Camp Distribution Site

Site Context: The 'Hospital Camp' is an unofficial settlement primarily serving the Sudanese community. This is distinct from the BMX camp visited the previous day, which predominantly serves the Eritrean community. The term 'Hospital Camp' is an unofficial nickname used by volunteers and aid workers.

Travel: Approximately 50-minute drive from the warehouse. I drove several volunteers to the site.

Group size: 32 volunteers deployed to this distribution site.

Services Provided at Hospital Camp

From the van: Tea, coffee, and biscuits; free SIM cards (provided by Free company); mobile phone accessories including charger ports and cables (these were quickly taken)

Information distribution: Leaflets about Rwanda deportation policies translated into multiple languages (Arabic, Eritrean, French). These leaflets include a memorisable phone number for legal aid if detained in the UK. Purpose is to set realistic expectations for those attempting channel crossings through unsafe routes.

Activities: Football matches, English conversation practice and lessons, sewing station, games

Other services: Litter picking around the settlement

My Role: I facilitated English conversation practice and basic English lessons. Worked with refugees using educational books to conduct language drills and exercises. Also participated in organizing football matches.

Site Infrastructure and Observations

Facilities present:

- Toilet facilities (notably absent at BMX camp the previous day)
- IBC (Intermediate Bulk Container) water tank, heavily used by Muslim refugees for ablution purposes before prayer

Population estimate: Over 100 individuals present, significantly more than the previous day's 38 at BMX. The atmosphere was busy and bustling, with some refugees playing music using speakers we provided.

Other organisations present: A charity providing medical aid was operating on-site. No police presence observed during this visit.

Minors observed: At least one minor present on-site. Strict safeguarding protocols prevented photography of minors. All photographs taken required verbal consent from adults (18+).

Interactions and Ethical Considerations

Refugees were extremely friendly and forthcoming. I was repeatedly questioned about:

- Routes and methods for accessing the UK
- The reality of the Rwanda deportation scheme (asked if it was 'kithib' - a lie in Arabic)

Researcher reflexivity: I felt uncomfortable discussing these topics and attempted to deflect conversations while maintaining honesty. I informed them that, to date, no one had been deported to Rwanda. This ethical tension between providing information and avoiding potentially dangerous guidance is an ongoing challenge in this research context.

Comparative Reflections

The Hospital Camp presented a markedly different atmosphere from BMX:

- Much higher population density (100+ vs. 38)
- Different community composition (predominantly Sudanese vs. Eritrean)
- Better infrastructure (toilets and water facilities present)
- More bustling, energetic atmosphere

Terminology note: Care for Calais refers to these locations as 'distribution centres' rather than 'camps,' reflecting their unofficial status and the transient nature of the populations they serve. All supplies were exhausted by the end of the distribution session.

Personal Reflections

The work is physically and emotionally exhausting. Returned to tent accommodation after the distribution session. The experience has been eye-opening, particularly the scale of operations and the complexity of needs at the Hospital Camp compared to previous sites.

Next steps: Tomorrow's planned destination is Dunkirk, approximately 40 minutes' drive away. Further provisions will be distributed there.

Part II: Azraq Refugee Camp, Jordan

August 2023

Thursday, 24 August 2023 (Morning Reflections)

Location: En route to Azraq Camp | Day 2 of Fieldwork

Pre-Field Entry Preparations

Travelling to Azraq for the second day of research observation and fieldwork. Today's focus will be on completing a full briefing and concentrating on field observations, building on insights from Tuesday's initial visit.

Reflections on Initial Visit (Tuesday)

Data gap identified: Upon reflection, I did not collect occupancy rates for businesses during Tuesday's visit. This is a critical oversight that needs to be addressed today.

Conflicting information on business numbers: Our guide, Shadi, initially stated there were approximately 400 businesses in Azraq camp but was uncertain about the distribution per village (suggesting roughly 100 per village). However, he was corrected by Abu Mohammed, a restaurant owner, suggesting local entrepreneurs have more accurate knowledge of the commercial landscape than camp officials.

Research questions for today:

1. What percentage of commercial units are actually occupied vs. vacant?
2. What are the terms and conditions for Jordanians operating businesses in the camp?
3. Are Jordanians required to share business units with Syrian refugees?
4. What are the access restrictions for Jordanian business owners?

Working hypothesis: Business units appear to be provided rent-free to Syrian refugees. However, if Jordanian nationals operate businesses, they may be required to share ownership or units with Syrian partners. This arrangement potentially reflects policy attempts to integrate host community and refugee economies while managing local tensions over economic opportunities.

Thursday, 24 August 2023 (Afternoon Field Observations)

Location: Village 6 and Village 3, Azraq Camp | Guide: Police Escort + Shadi

Entry Process and Initial Route

Successfully entered the refugee camp with police escort. We were taken directly to Village 6 as our starting point. This suggests either preferential routing by authorities or strategic camp layout planning.

Interviews Completed (First Three)

Interview 1: Mohammed - Taxi driver

Interview 2: Mohammed - Retail shop owner

Interview 3: Freelance engineer (name to be confirmed from paperwork)

Note: Detailed interview notes are recorded separately in interview transcripts. This diary focuses on observational and contextual data.

Field Observations: Market Infrastructure

Currently attempting to locate a butcher shop to continue interviews. Navigation through the camp is guided by our police escort, limiting autonomous exploration.

Key architectural observation: The market architecture in Villages 3 and 6 is highly uniform and analogous. The commercial units appear standardized in design, suggesting centralized planning and construction. This contrasts sharply with the organic, varied development observed in reports of Zaatari camp.

Occupancy rates - preliminary observation: Difficult to assess definitively during this visit. In Village 3, we observed only one shop, which was closed. This shop was formerly a butcher but is no longer operational. The closure may indicate:

- Economic challenges for certain business types
- Oversaturation of particular services
- Seasonal variations in operation
- Individual business failure or owner relocation

Comparative Analysis: Villages 3 vs. 6

Both villages visited today show similar market structures, suggesting a standardized approach to commercial space provision across the camp. However, Village 6 appears more active than Village 3 based on initial impressions. Further systematic observation needed to confirm this pattern.

Methodological Reflections

Challenge: The presence of a police escort, while necessary for access, constrains the research process. It limits:

- Freedom of movement within the camp
- Ability to observe informal or unauthorised economic activities
- Spontaneous interactions with refugees outside formal interview settings
- Time spent in each location (escort sets the pace)

The controlled nature of this fieldwork stands in stark contrast to the relatively unrestricted access experienced in Calais, where unauthorized settlements allow for more organic observation and interaction.

Next steps: Continue interviewing entrepreneurs, systematically document occupancy rates, and seek clarification on Jordanian-Syrian business partnership requirements.

Part III: Zaatari Refugee Camp, Jordan

December 2023

Wednesday, 27 December 2023

Location: Zaatari Camp, Zaatari Street (Champs-Élysées)

Entry Complications and Resolution

Encountered initial access difficulties due to translation errors in our documentation. Authorities were initially reluctant to grant entry, but the issue was resolved when they identified the problem was with their translation, not our paperwork. This delay highlighted the bureaucratic challenges researchers face in accessing official refugee camps, even with appropriate permissions.

Access time lost: Approximately 30-45 minutes spent resolving documentation issues.

Zaatari Street: The 'Champs-Élysées'

Critical discovery: The refugees themselves and police guards stationed in the camp are unaware of the street being called the 'Champs-Élysées' or 'Zaatari Street.' They do not use

these terms. This confirms that the naming convention is an external imposition by aid workers, NGOs, international media, or academic researchers.

Research implication: The disconnect between external nomenclature and internal knowledge reinforces that the romanticized 'Champs-Élysées' label represents an outsider perspective. This reveals how refugee spaces are narrativized and branded by external actors, potentially obscuring the refugees' own understandings and designations of their environment.

Interviews Completed

Six interviews completed during today's fieldwork session. Detailed interview records are maintained separately.

Interview 1: Hussein (Shop Manager)

Business type: Restaurant/mini-restaurant (described as 'cumbersome full shop')

Background: Hussein is the son of the actual owner, who is currently in Saudi Arabia. The father operates businesses both in Saudi Arabia and within the refugee camp, suggesting transnational entrepreneurial activities.

Father's business: Believed to be involved in logistics or transportation sector, operating between Saudi Arabia and the camp.

Business acquisition: Acquired the restaurant approximately 5 months ago (late July/early August 2023).

Key insight: The family has no prior experience in the food service industry. They appear to have diversified their business portfolio using profits from other ventures (likely the transportation/logistics business). This demonstrates:

- Capital accumulation is occurring within the camp economy
- Entrepreneurial refugees are diversifying beyond their original expertise
- The camp economy supports multiple business ownership by single families

Interview 2: Young Syrian Man from Daraa

Business location: Shop located directly next door to Hussein's restaurant.

Origin: From Daraa, Syria (referred to as 'cheb from Daraa' in field notes—'cheb' being colloquial Arabic for 'young man')

Geographic pattern emerging: All refugee entrepreneurs interviewed so far originate from Daraa. This is significant because:

- Daraa is close to the Jordanian border
- Early arrivals to Zaatari would likely be from nearby Syrian regions
- Earlier arrival may correlate with better business establishment and market positioning
- Daraa residents may have had stronger pre-existing networks or commercial experience

Note: Specific business type and detailed interview content to be referenced from formal interview transcripts.

Interviews 3-6: Details to be compiled from interview paperwork and formal transcripts.

Visual Documentation

Photographs taken throughout the visit. Images will be catalogued and referenced in the write-up, showing:

- Shop exteriors and commercial signage
- Street layout and business density along Zaatari Street
- Goods and services available
- Architectural features of commercial spaces

Initial Comparative Observations: Zaatari vs. Azraq

Spatial organisation: Zaatari's commercial area appears more organically developed and densely packed compared to Azraq's standardized, planned village markets. Businesses in Zaatari line the main thoroughfare in an apparently ad-hoc manner, suggesting bottom-up commercial development rather than top-down planning.

Business diversity: Preliminary observation suggests greater variety of business types in Zaatari compared to Azraq, though systematic analysis is needed to confirm this impression.

Entrepreneurial sophistication: Evidence of business portfolio diversification (Hussein's family case) suggests more mature and complex economic activity in Zaatari compared to what was observed in Azraq.

Researcher Reflections

The contrast between Zaatari's more established, bustling commercial street and Azraq's structured but less vibrant village markets is striking. This difference may reflect:

- Camp age and maturity (Zaatari opened 2012, Azraq opened 2014)
- Different planning philosophies (organic emergence vs. pre-planned structure)
- Varying levels of refugee agency in shaping commercial spaces
- Population size and density effects on market viability
- Geographic origins of refugees and pre-displacement commercial experience

The finding that even camp insiders don't use the 'Champs-Élysées' terminology is methodologically significant. It underscores the importance of distinguishing between etic (outsider) and emic (insider) perspectives in refugee camp research. External narratives and branding may obscure refugees' own meanings and relationships with their spaces.

— *End of Abridged Research Diary* —

Appendix G: Selected Visuals

In addition to images already used in data analysis chapters

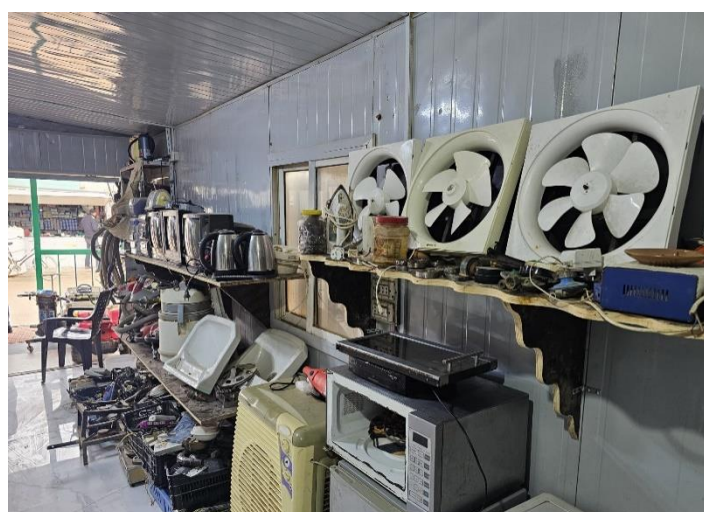
G1. Calais/Dunkirk



G2. Azraq



G3. Zaatari



Appendix H: Coding Structure(s)

Key: *RE* – refugee entrepreneur; *ND* – naturalistic data; *UN-UP* – UN urban planner; *CG* – camp guide; *TL* – translator; *RF* – research fieldnote

H1. Enabling Themes: Context Analysis

Aggregate Dimensions	Second-Order Themes	First Order Expressions
	<i>Inception & Temporality</i>	• <i>"because after [Zaatari] emerged during the beginning of the crisis... it happened organically" [UN-UP]</i> • <i>"They were just trying to get people shelter. Because of that, they created this market" [UN-UP]</i> • <i>"it was really hard to manage... It also left people who were more vulnerable" [UN-UP]</i> • <i>"whereas Azraq camp because it was pre planned and I joined when it was just starting to get... there was a lot more structure" [UN-UP]</i> • <i>" I remember there was this document that everyone was talking about, like the lessons learned from Zaatari" [UN-UP]</i> • <i>"Without close administration, Zataari became a lawless place" [ND-2]</i> • <i>"...it was really hard to manage... single women had it harder because there started to be these like dynamic of almost like mafias" [UN-UP]</i> • <i>"people decided to put it that way (market street design)... by the time I think the government and UNHCR caught up, it was too late (to change the design)" [UN-UP]</i> • <i>"As the daily flow of new refugees hit 4000, the organisation in charge of the camp, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, or UNHCR, ran out of manpower" [ND-2]</i> • <i>"In March, the UNHCR assigned him (Kilian Kleinschmidt – former camp manager) to rescue Zaatari from chaos" [ND-1]</i> • <i>"At first, the shopkeepers operated from tents. Then, when the UNHCR provided wooden caravans for the refugees to live in, the entrepreneurs got hold of these cut the sides out and created small kiosks" [ND-2]</i> • <i>"By 2014, when the camp was just two years old, it had over 1400 businesses" [ND-2]</i>

Institutional Voids

Institutional Fragmentation

- *"they created not only the marketplace, but like they actually built the... they took all the containers that were being distributed" [UN-UP]*
- *"Azraq was very quiet. I didn't feel there was life in the camp. It wasn't like a city. When you go to it, it's like the old movies - like an abandoned town" [TL]*
- *"Zaatari had more people (than Azraq)... That's why it has more life" [TL]*
- *"I am aware of the disparity in terms of the population... it being double (than Azraq) approximately 80,000" [UN-UP]*
- *"The camp has an even split of men and women...they marry young and have lots of children" [ND-2]*
- *"More than 6000 babies were born in Zaatari, in the camp's first four years, and 45,000 of the refugees here are under 8" [ND-2]*
- *"The reason it's set up like this... they felt that it (Zaatari) was, like, too centralised (i.e. market street architecture, line of shops). So the way that the market was designed, the government found it too centralised, too difficult for them in general to kind of manage and monitor" [UN-UP]*
- *"Azraq was in the middle of the desert. It's like an abandoned place. There are no cities around it" [TL]*
- *"Every village (at Azraq) had their own market" [CG]*
- *"it's huge (Azraq). And it's very hot and there's very little shaded area in between the villages" [UN-UP]*
- *"Villages 2 and 5 - we were not allowed to enter because they (the refugees) don't have security checks" [RD]*
- *"The formal economy of Zaatari is artificial under the complete control of outsiders, and as a result fails the most basic test of any well-functioning market to be a place where demand meets supply" [ND-2]*
- *"Most importantly, the tight security at the (Azraq) camp makes it much harder to smuggle out high value items" [ND-2]*
- *"Refugees cannot transfer cash between wallets, so aid money designated for food cannot be spent on clothes" [ND-2]*
- *"The system is designed so that money flows directly from the donors to the supermarket owners without passing through the refugees' hands" [ND-2]*

- *"because after [Zaatari] emerged during like the beginning of the crisis... it happened organically. Because of that, they (the refugees) created this market (i.e. without Jordanian co-owners). They have set up their businesses and by the time I think the government and UNHCR caught up, it was like too late" [UN-UP]*
 - *"they ended up doing like a system (at Azraq) where every kiosk and every business that opens up has to be like somehow Co owned by a Jordanian and a Syrian" [UN-UP]*
 - *"trying to deal with these frustrations that some Jordanians were having... ohh refugees are taking our jobs" [UN-UP]*
 - *"Regarding Jordanians, they can go with Syrians (at Azraq only) and make a company with them in the same shop" [CG]*
 - *"Private donors from Saudi Arabia brought in several hundred residential trailers (at Zaatari) without discussing it with Kleinschmidt (the camp manager) or his team first" [ND-1]*
 - *"139 organizations are helping the people in Zaatari. Doctors Without Borders is there, and so are Electricians Without Borders, and Gynaecologists Without Borders etc..." [ND-1]*
 - *"There is a Dutch guitar group, although Kleinschmidt has no idea what they are doing there" [ND-1]*
 - *"South Korea spent \$20,000 on a soccer field [Zataari] that no one uses" [ND-1]*
-
- *"I control 21 streets. My men patrol day and night" - Abu Hussein [ND-1]*
 - *"...almost like mafia (gangs) like certain areas of the camp controlled by certain people" [UN-UP]*
 - *"They want police to fear entering the camp, so that the mafia can go about its business without interruption" [ND-1]*
 - *"They want to prevent the aid organizations from installing a power grid, so that they can continue to sell illegally tapped electricity" [ND-1]*
 - *"Electricity supplies are often in formal spurs from the main grid, a practise that is banned but means free power" [ND-2]*
 - *"What would that mean for the services that the NGO's were supposed to be providing?" [UN-UP]*
 - *"The air-conditioner runs with electricity he is tapping from the Italian hospital" [ND-1]*

Shadow Institutions

Gangs-as Gatekeepers

- "Families buy a large bag of powdered milk for 9 dinars on their e-card and sell it immediately to a smuggler for seven dinars in cash" [ND-2]
- "The smuggler then slips out of the camp past the SRAD guards and resells the milk for 8 dinars to Jordanians" [ND-2]
- "...at the end of each day, Khalid takes home 20 dinars (through smuggling)" [ND-2]
- "Khalid is 15 years old. The smuggling game is new to him" [ND-2]
- "It's easy to blend in because Zaatari is a place to which families fled, and there are kids everywhere" [ND-2]
- "Unlike at the main gate, there is no barbed wire here, and there are no guards or checkpoints beyond the ring Rd" [ND-2]
- "Most boys have lost their fathers in the war and have become the sole breadwinner heading out to the fields alone" [ND-2]

Informal Market Systems

- "they took all they took the containers that were being distributed and they would shape them as they wanted" [UN-UP]
- "they [refugee gangs] created this market... by the time the government caught up, it was like too late" [UN-UP]
- "...when the UNHCR provided wooden caravans for the refugees to live in, the entrepreneurs got hold of these cut the sides out and created small kiosks" [ND-2]
- "Families buy a large bag of powdered milk for 9 dinars on their e-card and sell it immediately to a smuggler for seven dinars in cash" [ND-2]
- "Here we accept two types...(cash) of course, and also electronic wallets because the (UN) support money is distributed to it, and the customer can transfer it directly to my wallet" [RE2-Z]
- "They created some sort of system where people could provide services to each other without money, but like for example, you cut my hair. I'll fix your sink... rather than exchanging money for goods, you exchange goods for goods or services for goods or services for services" [UN-UP]
- "We have tinned beef which we don't want. We don't have shampoo, which we do want the kids help make the exchange" [ND-2]

		• <i>"I needed it for my work, so I brought it [machine] in without a permit by throwing it over the fence, and then I got a permit afterward" [RE14-Z]</i> • <i>"They (refugees) can go out from the camp with legal documentation...they can go for 14 days (at a time)" [CG]</i> • <i>"Some of the Bedouin farmers who live in the nearby desert town own pickup trucks and use them to perform an informal taxi bus service inside the camp" [ND-2]</i> • <i>"Carts carrying fruit and vegetables can be seen travelling the outer streets selling produce to those who are too old or injured to walk to the market" [ND-2]</i> • <i>"...(some want) free trade to remain restricted, so that smuggling continues to be worthwhile" [ND-2]</i> • <i>"By 2014, when the camp was just two years old, it had over 1400 businesses. With one company for every six adults" [ND-2]</i> • <i>"It just kept on popping up at an incredible rate...there are 3000 businesses" [ND-2]</i> • <i>"...they set up their businesses and by the time I think the government and UNHCR caught up, it was like too late...we (the refugees) have already created this market" [UN-UP]</i> • <i>"In the Zaatari refugee camp (now) we have 1800 businesses (downsized from 3000) compared to 375 businesses [in Azraq]" [UN-UP]</i>
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H2. Constraining Themes: Context Analysis

Aggregate Dimensions	Second-Order Themes	First Order Expressions
		• <i>"It's one month for every individual, and they return and renew it to leave the camp again" [RE3-A]</i> • <i>"Most people go on work leave in Zaatari and return to their homes at the end of the day... But here, the individual goes on work leave and needs to sleep outside the camp" [RE3-A]</i> • <i>"It is not good because it is 25 kilometres away from the nearest city, and this is an obstacle for young people who want to work outside the camp and have to sleep outside the camp" [RE17-A]</i>

*Spatial
Segregation*

- *"First thing is that there is a decrease in financial and winter aid because people used to receive financial aid to buy clothes and food" [RE10-A]*
- *"Their priority right now is to feed their children before buying new clothes or new shoes" [RE11-A]*
- *"Previously, people could buy school uniforms, bags, and toys or pens, for example, but now people save this money just to secure their food and drink" [RE18-A]*
- *"Through permits, we leave the camp and go to the area near us, such as Al-Wahdat or Zarqa, and bring goods" [RE4-A]*
- *"I send him what I want and submit a [formal] request to him here to enter the camp" [RE14-A]*
- *"A transport vehicle comes to the camp every 3 days, and I buy from it" [RE17-A]*
- *"Azraq was in the middle of the desert. It's like an abandoned place. There are no cities around it" [TL]*
- *"The nearest city to us is Zarqa, which is about 30 kilometres away" [RE1-A]*
- *"It is not good because it is 25 kilometres away from the nearest city" [RE17-A]*
- *"it's huge. And it's very hot and there's very little shaded area in between the villages" [UN-UP]*
- *"Villages 2 and 5 we were not allowed to enter because they don't have security checks" [CG]*
- *"Every village had their own market" [CG]*
- *"the camp gave out shops in 2016, and they are all gone by now" [RE3-A]*
- *"Azraq camp is closed [off] and the number of its visitors is restricted" [RE14-A]*
- *"there's a fixed marketplace. And I have to, you know, deal with it" [UN-UP]*
- *"You can visit the camp, of course, but if you want to live there, you can request reunification with your family there" [RE8-A]*
- *"It may affect in one respect, which is that the export locations are far away and you need to receive supplies from other and distant cities" [RE14-A]*
- *"this is an obstacle for young people who want to work outside the camp and have to sleep outside the camp" [RE17-A]*

Design Structures Immunise Agency	<i>Market Control Mechanisms</i>	• <i>"Every kiosk and business that opens up has to be like somehow co-owned by a Jordanian and a Syrian" [UN-UP]</i> • <i>"The main owner of the shop is Jordanian, and for whom I work, he rents the shop from him and pays him the rent monthly" [RE4-A]</i> • <i>"I registered my name to have my own shop, but I was not lucky" [RE19-A]</i> • <i>"The mall's prices are actually lower than market prices, and it's logical that it sells better than us" [RE15-A]</i> • <i>"Most people spend the visa [credit] and convert it into cash to shop here in the village market because it's cheaper" [RE15-A]</i> • <i>"The price is set between us [traders], and we are not trying to harm any of the merchants" [RE20-A]</i> • <i>"there was a lot of ..like management level conversations happening about how are we going to manage in this [Azraq] market" [UN-UP]</i> • <i>"It's not allowed to raise animals here [unlike Zaatari], such as donkeys, horses, or sheep" [RE15-A]</i> • <i>"when the market opened in 2016... I registered my name to have my own shop, but I was not lucky" [RE19-A]</i> • <i>"Through permits, we leave the camp and go to the area near us, such as Al-Wahdat or Zarqa, and bring goods" [RE4-A]</i> • <i>"I bring smoking supplies from Irbid from a company there. I send him what I want and submit a request to him here to enter the camp" [RE14-A]</i> • <i>"A transport vehicle comes to the camp every 3 days, and I buy from it" [RE17-A]</i>
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H3. Transformative Themes: Conduct Analysis

Aggregate Dimensions	Second-Order Themes	First Order Expressions
Dual Transformation	Entrepreneurial Pivot	• "I tried employment before in the Norway organization, but I was fired after the first day on the pretext that my children got sick a lot" [RE7-Z] • "Initially, I was uncomfortable working for others and wasn't getting a good salary. Here, I'm my own boss and don't have a manager" [RE13-Z] • "I don't want to work for anyone because I can't bear a young man telling me what to do while I'm an older man taking care of 14 people" [RE14-Z] • "When I came here, I was almost 18 years old and was completing my studies in Syria... But given the situation here, I stopped studying and went to work" [RE11-Z] • "I was still a student and completed my studies here until grade 12 in the camp. Then I went out to work in a towel factory...came back to the camp and opened a clothing store" [RE16-Z] • "I did not finish my studies. I was only in the ninth grade when I needed to leave school and go to work...it affected my health" [RE12-Z] • "My father was working in a tomato factory...he bought this place so that if he stopped working, we would find an alternative to the truck business" [RE1-Z] • "I was a farmer and a landowner in Syria. I used to cultivate the land and sell what was on it...I worked here on farms and opened a vegetable shop before the bicycle shop" [RE4-Z] • "I was a teacher in Syria for Islamic subjects, and I also had a cheese and dairy factory...here I found building and repair materials much more appropriate" [RE6-Z] • "In Syria, I used to work for people in construction, digging, or hard labour...I used to work on a cart selling food for dinner, and after I collected good money, I opened this shop" [RE7-Z] • "I was a farmer in Syria, and I had land that I cultivated and ate from...I opened this shop in the year 2013 because there were no opportunities to work in agriculture" [RE9-Z] • "In Syria, we used to work in upholstery and sewing...but here smoking is in greater demand" [RE12-Z]

*Transformative
Nostalgia*

- *"I have security, and I own my own business. I have settled here and do not even think about returning" [RE2-Z]*
- *"Here I gained the security of myself and my family, and this is the most important thing to me" [RE4-Z]*
- *"We came here, I found safety for my family and treatment, and this is the best thing" [RE7-Z]*
- *"I have a son there who has been gone for 12 years, and we know nothing about him" [RE6-Z]*
- *"We fled out of fear for our families and daughters from the unjust regime...there are people who suffered from mental illness, heart disease, and diabetes because of their anger at leaving their homeland" [RE5-Z]*
- *"Of course, it broke my heart because I lost my eldest son 12 days before I came here. He was only 27 years old" [RE14-Z]*
- *"Of course, I was affected because I lost my home, my farm, and all my possessions in the war" [RE4-Z]*
- *"We had a perfume shop in Syria, but after the war, we were unable to sell it and lost everything, so we had to start from scratch" [RE11-Z]*
- *"It definitely affected work, life, psychology, money, and education because it was a war in which we lost everything" [RE17-Z]*
- *"...this [Syria] is my country, but now it is without security or stability to the point that any police can beat you and even kill you because there is no one to hold them accountable" [RE6-Z]*
- *"I want to return, but the conditions there are unsafe and there is no stability...I have a large family of 8 that I cannot risk" [RE9-Z]*
- *"If it were safe and my family and I could return, I would go back and sell everything in this store, including the store itself. But there's no guarantee for life there" [RE16-Z]*

Re-embedding Collective Agency	<i>Re-embedding Homogeneity</i>	• <i>"We do not prefer to work for people, and most of us own businesses such as restaurants and groceries" [RE1-Z]</i> • <i>"We, the people of Daraa, are accustomed to having our own business. Even if you have a job, you have to have a shop to open after your work" [RE17-Z]</i> • <i>"Daraa has a high culture, and it's known for its teachers, doctors, and engineers that you can find throughout the Arab world due to their abundance" [RE17-Z]</i> • <i>"The reason is that the son of Daraa works, collects money, and uses it, and unlike the rest of the regions, we like to have our own work" [RE1-Z]</i> • <i>"Because we are merchants and are well-known in trade and export... I am accustomed to being my own boss, and I do not like to be governed by anyone, and this is how we were raised in Daraa" [RE5-Z]</i> • <i>"Daraa's people are farmers and merchants, and there are not many people who study and were raised to work and trade, even the municipalities of Daraa are all agricultural land or industrial areas" [RE8-Z]</i> • <i>"Most of the store owners are from Daraa... Unlike the rest of the governorates... Sometimes you enter a small village and find ten restaurants" [RE1-Z]</i> • <i>"There is none [competition], because we are all cousins in this field of work and we are all from the same village" [RE9-Z]</i> • <i>"Yes, he's my cousin because we bakers come from the same village in Daraa" [RE17-Z]</i> • <i>"Like Abu Hussein, he has a basic business and wanted to open a business because it is something that is present in all the people of Daraa" [RE1-Z]</i> • <i>"Also, at the beginning of the war, the people of Daraa were the ones who had money or capital, even if it was small, and they were the ones who were able to open shops" [RE2-Z]</i> • <i>"I learned this work from my uncles in the camp because they were clothing merchants in Syria" [RE13-Z]</i> • <i>"We, the son of Daraa works, collects money, and uses it... we like our homes to be like villas, unlike the rest of the governorates" [RE1-Z]</i> • <i>"We in Daraa love to work, and we love to own our own business" [RE2-Z]</i> • <i>"Because we are merchants and are well-known in trade and export... I am accustomed to being my own boss" [RE5-Z]</i>
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	Emancipatory Networks	• "As for the goods, there is a distributor in the camp itself, and he brings materials and food of all kinds and brings them from Amman" [RE1-Z] • "There is a supplier here who brings items and parts from Amman" [RE4-Z] • "My uncles bring them from Ramtha or Amman, and I take clothes from them. They come every 15 to 30 days" [RE13-Z] • "We have a partner in the second store, and he goes in his car to the central vegetable market" [RE5-Z] • "Yes, also any store, from a butcher shop to a restaurant, we supply to them, deal with them" [RE5-Z] • "there is none [competition], because we are all cousins in this field of work" [RE9-Z] • "I also have a page on Facebook where I publish my work" [RE8-Z] • "Yes, I use Facebook and display my work, products, and prices" [RE9-Z] • "We also deliver for free and take orders via WhatsApp" [RE17-Z] • "I needed it for my work, so I brought it [machine] in without a permit by throwing it over the fence, and then I got a permit afterward" [RE14-Z] • "The air-conditioner runs with electricity he is tapping from the Italian hospital. The water for his tea is from canisters provided by UNICEF. He hasn't worked, paid or thanked anyone for any of it" [ND-1] • "His team are smugglers, and their contraband consists of food, cigarettes, electronic equipment and medical supplies" [ND-2] • "Families buy a large bag of powdered milk for 9 dinars on their e-card and sell it immediately to a smuggler for seven dinars in cash. The smuggler then slips out of the camp past the SRAD Guards and resells the milk for 8 dinars to Jordanians" [ND-2] • "...dynamic, almost like mafia [gangs]...like certain areas of the camp [marketplace] are controlled by certain people" [UN-UP]
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H4. Reproductive Themes: Conduct Analysis

Aggregate Dimensions	Second-Order Themes	First Order Expressions
Partial Transformation	<i>Subordinate Occupational Pivot</i>	• <i>"every kiosk and every business that opens up has to be like somehow Co owned by a Jordanian and a Syrian" [UN-UP]</i> • <i>"The main owner of the shop is Jordanian, and for whom I work, he rents the shop from him and pays him the rent monthly" [RE4-A]</i> • <i>"Jordanians can buy shops from here and work in them like the camp residents, but most of them rent their shops to the camp residents" [RE4-A]</i> • <i>"No, I just rent the place because the camp gave out shops in 2016, and they are all gone by now" [RE3-A]</i> • <i>"I am just an employee here because it is difficult to open your own shop as it requires capital" [RE8-A]</i> • <i>"I am not the shop owner here, I am just an employee... there is injustice to the worker because he pays me only five dinars to work 12 hours a day" [RE14-A]</i> • <i>"When I arrived, I started working as an employee at a restaurant" [RE20-A]</i> • <i>"In our marketplace, there is injustice to the worker because he pays me only five dinars to work 12 hours a day, and the income becomes from 150 to 170 per month" [RE14-A]</i> • <i>"Opening a new store is considered a very difficult thing, and if you pay attention, there are many stores that have closed again" [RE18-A]</i> • <i>"If I had capital, I would open a falafel shop again next to this shop... I am not talking about a large amount, only 1500" [RE19-A]</i> • <i>"I learned how to fix phones through a workshop provided by the camp and other organizations" [RE7-A]</i> • <i>"From the camp itself and from an organisation that held sewing courses. After that, I started training for shops here in the camp" [RE16-A]</i> • <i>"The camp held courses for tailoring, and I learned how to make clothes there" [RE18-A]</i> • <i>"Although there are difficult days for me and my children financially, I would rather live in safety than the chaos that exists in Syria" [RE4-A]</i> • <i>"Here it is much better and safer, and there is stability in the camp" [RE9-A]</i> • <i>"The situation here is better now because there is security" [RE12-A]</i> • <i>"If I return to Syria, what will I do there? There is nothing to eat or work in" [RE2-A]</i>

	<i>Paralysing Nostalgia</i> • "Syria is not stable, and there is no one who does not like to return to his country. But the conditions are difficult" [RE8-A] • "I want to return, but the conditions are difficult, there is war, and living there does not help me grow" [RE8-A] • "I would rather stay here than go back under the regime" [RE3-A] • "I would rather live in a camp than live in fear. Although there are difficult days for me and my children financially" [RE4-A] • "Of course, I want to return to Syria, but the situation there is neither safe nor stable. The situation here is better now because there is security, I can sleep comfortably" [RE12-A] • "If I return to Syria, I have a psychological condition. I became afraid of the people there" [RE2-A] • "I want to return, but the conditions are difficult, there is war, and living there does not help me grow or encourage me to build a family there" [RE8-A] • "Living there does not help me grow" [RE8-A]
	<i>Re-embedding Heterogeneity</i> • "We are about ten kilometres away from Damascus" [RE2-A] • "I am from the Damascus countryside" [RE3-A] • "I lived in the Damascus countryside" [RE4-A] • "Before in Syria, I was a farmer and a landowner near Damascus. We used to cultivate the land in Damascus countryside, and I had a farm. I had 50 sheep in the Damascus countryside" [RE12-A] • "I was studying at Damascus University" [RE14-A] • "My name is XXX, I'm Syrian from Homs" [RE1-A] • "I used to work in construction in Homs before the war" [RE6-A] • "We came from Homs when I was 10 at the beginning of the war" [RE7-A] • "I am from Homs in Syria" [RE9-A] • "I lived for ten years in Greece. Before the war, I came here in Jordan in 2014" [RE2-A] • "I was a truck driver for goods through Syria not outside on international roads" [RE3-A] • "I used to go to Lebanon to trade" [RE12-A] • "I entered Jordan in 2013 and lived here and there...I applied to enter the camp" [RE18-A]

Re-embedding Fragmented Agency	<i>Dependency Networks</i>	• <i>"..I just rent the place because the camp gave out shops in 2016, and they are all gone by now" [RE3-A]</i> • <i>"Jordanians can buy shops from here and work in them like the camp residents, but most of them rent their shops to the camp residents" [RE4-A]</i> • <i>"every kiosk and every business that opens up has to be like somehow co-owned by a Jordanian and a Syrian" [UN-UP]</i> • <i>"The only way I could get my own place is if someone leaves the camp for good" [RE3-A]</i> • <i>"Opening a new store is considered a very difficult thing, and if you pay attention, there are many stores that have closed again" [RE18-A]</i> • <i>"If I had capital, I would open a falafel shop again next to this shop... I am not talking about a large amount, only 1500" [RE19-A]</i> • <i>"No, I am just an employee here because it is difficult to open your own shop as it requires capital" [RE-4]</i> • <i>"I am just an employee here because it is difficult to open your own shop as it requires capital" [RE8-A]</i> • <i>"I am not the shop owner here, I am just an employee... there is injustice to the worker because he pays me only five dinars to work 12 hours a day" [RE14-A]</i> • <i>"Through permits, we leave the camp and go to the area near us, such as Al-Wahdat or Zarqa, and bring goods" [RE4-A]</i> • <i>"I send him what I want and submit a request to him here to enter the camp" [RE14-A]</i> • <i>"A transport vehicle comes to the camp every 3 days, and I buy from it" [RE17-A]</i>
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