

Migration and Sending Cities: Transnational Commercial Districts and Development Potential in Dakar, Senegal

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Over the last decades research investigating the relation between migration and development has led to controversial results. In many countries remittance flows are larger than official development aid, therefore raising questions about how these resources are utilised. Studies around the world, in fact, show that a large proportion of remittances is used for consumption rather than for more productive investments. In addition, research on the small business activities initiated or supported by many migrants, in view of their return or to provide their families with local revenue, has revealed that these may not always be innovative and can be exposed to high failure rates when they are set up in sectors that are already saturated. This article argues that focusing exclusively on the *economic success* and *innovation capacity* of migrant-initiated businesses is however a limited view, as it fails to take into account other ways in which these activities positively affect the lives of people in the home country.

Based on ethnographic data collected among Senegalese migrants, their families and local non-migrant populations in the city of Dakar, this paper shows that small-scale commercial activities of migrants have flourished in particular in certain areas of the city. Here, the number and concentration of migrant businesses allows us to speak of a rise of transnational commercial districts. Seen individually, many of the businesses are scarcely innovative, subject to unstable fortune and present a high turnover. Nevertheless, when considered as a whole, they can be said to have a developmental impact on the local context. These activities are in fact often clustered in the peripheral neighbourhoods of the city's *banlieue* from which many migrants originate or to which they plan to return. This has promoted an upgrade of popular neighbourhoods and has changed the *entitlements* of local inhabitants. Migrants' investments have provoked changes in the distribution of employment opportunities within the city, making work available beyond the city centre. Similarly, access to the suppliers of goods and services is now possible in previously barred areas.