Executive summary

Business leaders (entrepreneurs, managers, civil servants involved in managing State-owned enterprises and Agencies) are subject of extensive historical research which is frequently condensed into biographies (books) and also repertoires, or biographic dictionaries. In almost all the European countries, biographic dictionaries collecting profiles of business leaders with detailed information about their education, training, relationships, initiatives, political views and culture are available, very frequently designed and completed in order to give a comprehensive portrait of the country’s heritage in terms of business culture and entrepreneurial creativity. One of the advantages of these biographic dictionaries, which are normally compiled by several authors under the coordination of a scientific direction, is a relatively high level of homogeneity in the collection and elaboration of information. This comparability can be extended at the European level, where many other dictionaries are available at the national, and sometimes at the regional level. The comparative analysis of the repertoires can be done in many ways, being the most promising, in my opinion, those going in the direction of prosopographic analysis.
Prosopography is here intended broadly as the comparative analysis of a selected group of individuals sharing some common characteristics. The paper will provide an example of a mix of qualitative and quantitative analysis of the biographic profiles of business leaders following a methodology defined as “statistical prosopography”. Statistical prosopography is based on the operationalization of individual characteristics in order basically to make them confrontable and miserable over space and time. The aim of such a research on a multi-national community of entrepreneurs would be, in first place, to individuate the pervasiveness of similar traits in terms of business culture across different countries, but also the differences which allow to speak of “national models of entrepreneurship”.

The paper is based on the analysis of a database of entrepreneurial biographies operationalized using a template listing around 80 variables, including some related to the social and political environment. So far, the database includes information on more than 3 thousand individuals to be analyzed, starting from the last decades of the Nineteenth century.