

Understanding the interplay between immigrant nascent entrepreneurship and cross-cultural adaptation

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immigrants

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Abstract

Purpose – All entrepreneurs face challenges during their venture start-up process, but immigrant entrepreneurs face additional and distinctive challenges due to their contextual newness. This paper focuses on understanding the intertwined journeys of nascent entrepreneurship and cross-cultural adaptation of immigrants in a small Western European country where immigrant entrepreneurship is still a relatively new phenomenon.

Design/methodology/approach – The induction-driven, 18-month longitudinal empirical inquiry focused on six early-stage nascent entrepreneurs. Qualitative methods included participant observation during an enterprise program, qualitative interviews and ongoing informal communication.

Findings – The data uncovered the interplay between the nascent immigrant entrepreneurship and cross-cultural adaptation. This led to the development of a novel conceptual framework which highlights how the cross-cultural adaptation domain links with the process of recognition, evaluation and exploitation of entrepreneurial opportunities by immigrant entrepreneurs. While varying temporarily and contextually, cross-cultural adaptation was found to create both enabling and constraining tensions within the nascent entrepreneurial experiences of immigrants.

Research limitations/implications – It is recognized that undertaking just six cases may present a significant limitation of the research, but a close examination of even one individual's lived experience can yield valuable insights. It is hoped that future work will test the highlighted research propositions and other findings in different empirical contexts, and so add to the emerging conceptual framework on nascent immigrant entrepreneurship within the context of cross-cultural adaptation.

Originality/value – No previous qualitative studies have been undertaken seeking to understand how cross-cultural adaptation interacts with the early stages of nascent immigrant entrepreneurial activity. By integrating new venture creation and cross-cultural adaptation theories, this research contributes to the conceptualisation of early stages of nascent entrepreneurial activities of immigrants in a new host environment. The implications of the research are also relevant to enterprise support bodies, policymakers and practitioners who support immigrant entrepreneurship.

Keywords Immigrant entrepreneurship, Nascent entrepreneurship, New venture creation, Cross-cultural adaptation

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

Starting a new business can be a challenging process for any entrepreneur. However, it has been shown that immigrant entrepreneurs face additional and distinctive challenges that native entrepreneurs will not endure when starting a business (OECD, 2017). These

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challenges can include issues such as cultural adaptation, navigation of the new institutional environment and entrepreneurial ecosystems, lack of developed and mutually trusted local social networks, experiences of racism, verbal and non-verbal communication competencies, and access to finance (for example [Xu et al., 2019](#); [Dabic et al., 2020](#); [Walsh and Martin, 2021](#)). Over the past three decades, considerable literature has focused on broadening the understanding of immigrant entrepreneurship in general ([Honig et al., 2010](#); [Jones et al., 2012](#); [Light and Dana, 2013](#); [Guercini et al., 2017](#)) which reflects the reality of an increasingly globalized world in the entrepreneurial process ([Bhachu, 2017](#); [Elo et al., 2018](#); [Pidduck and Clark, 2021](#)). In seeking a greater appreciation of the experiences of immigrant entrepreneurs, much of the theoretical development in the immigrant entrepreneurship field has converged on individual and group level analysis, often examining immigrant cohorts from a disadvantaged point of view, and thereafter focusing on cultural predispositions and structural shortcomings ([Light, 2004](#); [Rath and Kloosterman, 2000](#); [Ozasir-Kacar and Essers, 2019](#)).

It has been argued that much of the scholarly work on immigrant entrepreneurship remains fragmented and highly contextual ([Dabic et al., 2020](#)). The extant scholarly work focusing on nascent entrepreneurship draws significantly from immigrant-focused entrepreneurship concepts such as mixed embeddedness ([Kloosterman, 2010](#); [De Vries et al., 2015](#)), but also from general nascent entrepreneurship literature ([Lassalle and McElwee, 2016](#)). There is also a separate body of literature that deepens our understanding of cross-cultural adaptation of immigrants and focuses on studying the adaptive processes of immigrants within an unfamiliar host environment ([Kim, 2001, 2017](#); [Berry, 2005](#); [Bhatia and Ram, 2009](#)). Surprisingly, despite some acknowledgements of the value of connecting the nascent entrepreneurial and cross-cultural adaptation journeys, and uncovering the intricacies of these intertwined experiences ([Singh and DeNoble, 2004](#); [Jaffe et al., 2018](#)), the literature remains silent in this regard as evidenced in the comprehensive review of immigrant entrepreneurship undertaken by [Dabic et al. \(2020\)](#) which failed to identify any work on the influence of cross-cultural adaptation on immigrant entrepreneurship.

This paper draws together the literature on nascent immigrant entrepreneurship and cross-cultural adaptation at the individual level of an immigrant at an early stage of new venture creation seeking to answer the question: *What is the interplay between nascent immigrant entrepreneurship and cross-cultural adaptation?* This question is explored by examining the data within the literature on new venture creation that essentially is concerned with recognising, evaluating and exploiting entrepreneurial opportunities while simultaneously negotiating resources ([Shane, 2003](#); [Sarason et al., 2006](#); [Huang and Knight, 2017](#)) and cross-cultural adaptation ([Kim, 2001, 2017](#)). Connecting and revealing the experiences of the two journeys – nascent entrepreneurship and cross-cultural adaptation – can offer valuable insights for entrepreneurship scholars and practitioners who are seeking to identify nuanced insights into very early new venture creation efforts in unfamiliar contexts.

The emphasis of this study is placed on an explorative and inductive approach, seeking to understand the two interlinked journeys as they happened ([Patton, 2015](#)), or as [Steyaert \(2007\)](#) put it – “becoming”. The empirical focus is on in-depth case studies of six nascent immigrant entrepreneurs comprising of three female and three male participants who each originated from different countries for economic reasons. The longitudinal approach of 18 months allowed for prolonged interaction with each of the participants and immersion in their entrepreneurial pursuits and cross-cultural adaptation. The study was set in a small Western European country where significant immigration and immigrant entrepreneurship is still a relatively new phenomenon of over two decades, and it occurs without the widespread pre-existence of immigrant enclaves typically found in other Western countries with long-term historical immigration ([GEM, 2020](#)).

The data uncovered the interrelated nature of an immigrant's cross-cultural adaptation within the nascent entrepreneurial process. While varying temporarily and contextually, cross-cultural adaptation was found to create both enabling and constraining tensions within the nascent entrepreneurial experiences of immigrants. A novel conceptual framework was developed which highlights how the cross-cultural adaptation domain links with the process of recognition, evaluation and exploitation of entrepreneurial opportunities by immigrants and considers different outcomes in relation to launching a new venture. The contributions are both theoretical and practical. The article contributes to immigrant entrepreneurship by highlighting how cross-cultural adaptation experiences interact with nascent entrepreneurship leading to new venture birth, postponement or abandonment of nascent entrepreneurial efforts. The findings are also of significant relevance to enterprise support organizations working with immigrant entrepreneurs as learnings from this study can contribute to better tailored approaches and ultimately more successful immigrant entrepreneurs.

Literature review

Nascent entrepreneurial process

Immigrant entrepreneurship is usually positioned within the broader established literature of minority entrepreneurship (OECD, 2017) and it also relates to the recently conceptualized topics such as transitional entrepreneurship which includes those entrepreneurs who are socially, institutionally or resourcefully marginalized (Pidduck and Clark, 2021). A conventional "disadvantaged" perspective suggests that immigrants pursuing entrepreneurial activities in their new host country is a common response to blockages in career mobility experienced in the labour market (Stenning and Dawley, 2009; Guercini *et al.*, 2017; Treviso and Lopez, 2018). Others have argued (Clark and Drinkwater, 2007; Aliaga-Isla and Rialp, 2013) that an immigrant's decision to become an entrepreneur cannot be simply reduced to the push factors of the labour market versus the pull factors of entrepreneurship. Individual human capital characteristics such as education, gender, previous career, and entrepreneurial experience (Kwong *et al.*, 2009; Williams, 2009) can also be influencing factors in immigrant entrepreneurship. Empirical investigations on these factors have helped to build a better understanding regarding the reasons why immigrants start their own business in host countries. Other contributions to the theoretical and empirical understanding of immigrant entrepreneurship include constructs such as mixed embeddedness (Kloosterman, 2010; Jones *et al.*, 2014; Bagwell, 2018), transnational entrepreneurship (Drori *et al.*, 2009; Pruthi *et al.*, 2018) and the concept of "super-diversity" connected to an increasingly globalized, connected world (Ram *et al.*, 2013; Vertovec, 2017).

Despite the advances made in understanding immigrant entrepreneurship, researchers such as Ram *et al.* (2017) have suggested that most empirical investigations still focus on the "lower end", more marginalized immigrant entrepreneurial groups, or "underdog entrepreneurs" as referenced by Miller and LeBreton-Miller (2017). This in turn dismisses the empirical investigation of immigrant entrepreneurs of more diverse backgrounds, who may draw on wider and more varied resources (Lassmann and Busch, 2015), and who may attempt to pursue entrepreneurial activities akin to host country entrepreneurs. Some studies have begun to emerge (e.g. Gonzalez, 2017) which recognize that nascent immigrant entrepreneurs may wish to serve the needs of customers beyond their country of residence (Osaghae and Cooney, 2019). Expanding thinking to incorporate such entrepreneurial activity requires that consideration be given to concepts applied in the mainstream nascent entrepreneurship literature that may be helpful in explaining how immigrants become entrepreneurs in the context of their new host country.

Over the past three decades, the actions that entrepreneurs undertake during the pre-venture phase have become a key research area in entrepreneurship literature (Gartner, 1989; Davidsson and Honig, 2003; Treffers *et al.*, 2017). Reynolds and White (1992) conceptualized a nascent entrepreneur as someone who undergoes a series of gestation activities which are intended to result in a viable start-up. Hopp and Sonderegger (2015) suggested that pre-start-up experience and the intentions of nascent entrepreneurs come together to shape the entrepreneurial gestation process. Steyaert (2007) highlighted that the nascent entrepreneurial process is essentially about “becoming”, underlining the dynamic and temporal nature of this process. Shane’s (2003) conceptual framework of the individual-opportunity nexus incorporates this process of emergence. Thus, the literature suggests that both recognition and exploitation of entrepreneurial opportunities is seen as a process during which individuals recognize entrepreneurial opportunities, develop them over time and then re-define, complete or abandon them (Bhave, 1994). Furthermore, some literature advocates that deliberate search rather than random chance means that individuals are likely to arbitrarily locate information which may lead towards the recognition and exploration of an entrepreneurial opportunity (Casson, 2003; Hills and Singh, 2004; Volery, 2007; Hopp and Sonderegger, 2015). Since the individual-opportunity nexus allows the incorporation of individual and contextual variables to be considered and enables one to understand what is happening as nascent entrepreneurs attempt to “connect the dots” and pursue business opportunities, this paper draws upon Shane’s (2003) conceptual framework to understand the early start-up experiences of the research participants.

In determining the factors that impact on immigrant entrepreneurial activity, the notion of social, human and financial capital (Bourdieu, 1986; Becker, 1993) has been successfully applied to understanding the new venture creation process amongst immigrants (Nee and Sanders, 2001; Portes *et al.*, 2002; Ram *et al.*, 2008; Bhachu, 2017). Linder *et al.* (2020) confirmed that no singular form of entrepreneurial capital impacts on a successful new venture creation alone, rather it is a combination of the different forms of capital that ensures the successful exploitation of entrepreneurial opportunities. For example, the social networks of nascent immigrant entrepreneurs span across established and new relationships (Nahapiet and Ghoshal, 1998). The critical role of familial and co-immigrant connections in business creation and functioning, as well as the lack of bridging ties with the host population in the entrepreneurial process, has frequently been highlighted in empirical studies (Davidsson and Honig, 2003; Light and Dana, 2013; Bird and Wennberg, 2016; Ram *et al.*, 2017). Griffin-EL and Olabisi (2018) explained how an immigrant’s social orientation to their host country’s structure changes over time and that immigrants are considering initial business opportunities amidst new relationships that are essentially still embryonic and temporary. Although role models can play a vital part in initiating a new venture (Carter *et al.*, 2003), Contín-Pilart and Larraza-Kintana (2015) found that nascent immigrant entrepreneurs are less likely to be influenced in their entrepreneurial activity by past and present entrepreneurs in the region where they live compared with the native population as they cannot relate to local role models.

Kushnirovich *et al.* (2018) linked the perception of entrepreneurial risk-taking propensity (in relation to the perceived feasibility of starting a new venture) to risks related to immigration-related experiences and changed social environment. Unger *et al.* (2011) showed that previous entrepreneurial experiences rather than formal education were positively linked to successful start-ups. Achidi Ndofo and Priem (2011) found that immigrant entrepreneurs’ endowments of economic, human and social capital, together with their degrees of social identification within their co-immigrant community, influenced their strategic choice to start a business focused either on their ethnic enclave or the dominant market. Although the literature implies that the level of acculturation that an immigrant experiences may influence their willingness to start a business, little research has been undertaken to understand the relationship between nascent immigrant entrepreneurship and cross-cultural adaptation.

Being an immigrant – cross-cultural adaptation experiences

The literature is inconsistent when discussing the definition of “immigrant” and “ethnic”, with some researchers using these terms interchangeably (Jones *et al.*, 2012; Thiel and Seiberth, 2017). For the purposes of this study, immigrants are defined as individuals who were born in a country other than their host country and then moved to a host country from their home country, while ethnicity is viewed as part of an individual make-up rather than a sole defining characteristic (Pieterse, 2003). Akin to nascent entrepreneurship being considered a process of “becoming” (Steyaert, 2007), cross-cultural adaptation is also defined and viewed as a continuing process of adjustments and re-adjustments to a new environment with constant tensions (Kim, 2001). Cross-cultural adaptation is not solely embedded in the context of a host country, but rather it is seen as transcending cultural spaces where familiar and unfamiliar elements of home and host cultures connect, clash and re-adjust (Kim, 2001, 2017; Vertovec, 2017). Berry’s (2005) heuristic model considers the extent to which immigrants wish to maintain their own cultural identity and the degree of contact they wish to have with the natives which results in four cross-cultural adaptation strategies: integration, assimilation, separation and marginalisation. However, this model has been criticized for its lack of dynamic nature, as immigrants often adopt different cultural identity positions depending on their situational context reflected in today’s complex reality (Bhatia and Ram, 2009; Kim, 2015; Bierwaczzonek and Waldzus, 2016).

The concept of “intercultural personhood” (2001, 2017) sees an individual “not as a rather static package of more or less stable internal structure, but as a dynamic and self-reflexive system that observes itself and renews itself as it continuously interacts with the environment” (Kim, 2008, p. 35); this understanding is especially true in the context of a globalising world (Kim, 2017). Kim (2001) outlined the key features that impact on cross-cultural adaptation as: (1) personal predispositions (such as preparedness for change, ethnic proximity and adaptive personality); (2) environment (such as host receptivity and conformity pressure and co-immigrant group strength); (3) personal communication (such as communication competence within the host society); and (4) host and co-immigrant social communication. Kim (2017) added that the interplay of these factors may lead to intercultural transformation (such as functional fitness, psychological health and intercultural identity) that is aligned to the complex and evolving nature of cultural identity known as intercultural personhood. Other researchers (such as McKay-Semmler and Kim, 2014; Lee, 2018) further developed Kim’s theory when studying cross-cultural adaptation of minority groups in different contexts.

When nascent immigrant entrepreneurship and cross-cultural adaptation are considered together, a distinctive perspective is revealed that has not been addressed previously in research (Singh and DeNoble, 2004; Dheer, 2018). Given that no previous qualitative studies have been undertaken seeking to understand how cross-cultural adaptation might interact with the early stages of nascent immigrant entrepreneurial activity, this study draws attention to the profound importance that cross-cultural adaptation has on the new venture creation process given the dynamic tensions that it generates. The study questions the current understanding of the experiences of immigrant entrepreneurs and seeks to uncover the interplay between *early nascent immigrant entrepreneurship and cross-cultural adaptation* as it addresses the call to action by researchers for greater understanding of these interlinked experiences.

Methods

The overall study sought to analyse the experiences of a specific group of early-stage nascent entrepreneurs – immigrants. This article focuses on the overall findings of the study in relation to early nascent entrepreneurial efforts and cross-cultural adaptation. Walsh and Martin (2021) focus on a subset of the data and examined the role of social capital and relational leadership practices. The in-depth 18-month, longitudinal empirical investigation

studied six immigrants who lived in the host country for less than seven years. This approach enabled the researchers to observe the process of becoming (Steyart, 2007) as it unfolded live (Patton, 2015; Yin, 2018). Studying complex and dynamic entrepreneurial events as experienced by the immigrants located in a specific context and time (Maxwell, 2005) helped to understand these experiences and to avoid the biases that post-hoc studies entail (Chandler and Lyon, 2001). The chosen methodological approach and study duration generated much richness regarding the “ups-and-downs” of early venture attempts which may result either in successful progression to a venture start-up or abandonment (Davidsson, 2005). This is supported by specific extant literature calls regarding the need for more longitudinal qualitative studies relating to new venture creation (Blackburn and Kovalainen, 2009; Jones *et al.*, 2012; Aliaga-Isla and Rialp, 2013).

Research setting and sample

This study was set in a small Western country where immigration is a relatively new phenomenon and immigrant entrepreneurship occurs without the widespread pre-existence of immigrant enclaves typically found in many other Western countries (GEM, 2020). The six nascent immigrant entrepreneurs were purposely selected at the beginning of a pre-enterprise program (enterprise program) funded by a local government agency that specifically supported immigrant entrepreneurs. Yin (2018) suggested that participants should be deliberately chosen so that each can add value and richness to the study. The main characteristics of the research participants (in terms of gender, age, place of origin, family status, length of stay in host country, level of education, previous entrepreneurial experience, employment experience, and business ideas) are summarized in Table 1.

Each participant originated from a different economic and socio-cultural background. Each person had travelled to the country of study to pursue economic opportunity and no participant was an asylum seeker or a refugee. The participants' length of stay at the beginning of the study varied from one to seven years – a period that is considered recent in terms of cross-cultural adaptation (Kim, 2017). The family status of the participants was also heterogeneous and there was a significant diversity regarding their place of origin and ethnicity that added further diversity and sample richness. Even though all participants acquired high levels of formal education and were of similar ages, it was judged that the impact of this to be minimal. Business ideas varied with only one out of 17 ideas generated by the participants focusing solely on co-immigrant markets. Such a small, yet diverse, sample offered multiple opportunities for exploring how a person's circumstances might influence one's approach to entrepreneurial activity within the process of cross-cultural adaptation. All participants' identifying details were anonymized in line with research ethical guidelines (Saunders *et al.*, 2016; Dench *et al.*, 2004) to protect their identity.

Data generation and analysis

The data was primarily generated by the first author (who is also an immigrant), with the status as an “insider” creating high levels of trust among the participants. This was evident in some conversations when the participants spoke of “us” (the participant and researcher) and them (the natives).

Table 2 details key research tools that were used to generate data over the 18-month period: participant observation, two rounds of qualitative interviews and regular informal communication. The first author used their own entrepreneurial idea during the enterprise program which took a form of the participant-observer approach (Saunders *et al.*, 2016). Adopting this form of observation enabled common conversations and gaining trust over time. Semi-structured interviews with participants (Denzin and Lincoln, 2017) included some predefined themes, while allowing for other concepts to emerge. Initially, the focus was on the

Pseudonym	Lietus	Lisa	Monika	Obusi	Pamela	Sebastien
Gender	Male	Female	Female	Male	Female	Male
Age	30-39	30-39	30-39	30-39	30-39	30-39
Home country	Lithuania	Albania	Hungary	Nigeria	India	France
Family status	Living with partner, 2 children	Living with partner, 2 children	No partner or children	Living with partner, 3 children	Living with partner, 2 children	Separated, 1 son in France
Years in host country	1	4	1	2	7	2.5
Highest level of education	Master's Degree	Diploma	Master's Degree	Diploma	Master's Degree	Master's Degree
Previous entrepreneurial experience	5 years Industrial shelving installation	3 years Family restaurant	None	None	None	4 years Vending machines
Employment in host country at study commencement	Part-time construction	Part-time administrator	Full-time architect	Unemployed	Advertising freelancer	Full-time digital marketing
Business ideas	Jewellery shop, family restaurant	Hairdressing, pizzeria/family restaurant, book-keeping	Energy certification consultancy, breeze blocks distribution, Jewellery design and maker classes	Recruitment agency in healthcare industry, franchise coffee shop	Communication platform for immigrant businesses, sponsorship message on reusable bags	Furniture design, 4 different technology-related online sales

Table 1. Sample description

nascent entrepreneurial experiences, but cross-cultural adaptation concepts such as a lack of confidence in establishing local contacts or feelings of not belonging to the local environment emerged after initial observations and the first round of interviews. All recordings of interviews were transcribed and anonymized (Saunders *et al.*, 2016). Ongoing informal communication using methods such as informal conversations, informal meetings, Skype, phone and emails further enhanced the understanding of the experiences of the immigrant entrepreneurs.

Data analysis was conducted in tandem with fieldwork. During the first phase of participant observation, reflective notes and initial analysis provided the first sense-making opportunities. Data was generated and analysed in a parallel manner (Denzin and Lincoln, 2017), alternating between cycles of inductive and deductive reasoning (Gioia *et al.*, 2013). NVivo (qualitative data management software) was used to aid with data analysis and ensured transparency and traceability of the analysis process. The evolving coding structure utilized is shown in Figure 1. The data was first analysed in an inductive, “bottom up” approach. These first order codes provided granular insights into the participants’ experiences of early new venture creation – such as their motivations, sources of entrepreneurial ideas and how they progressed or struggled with their new venture creation. When reviewing the initial codes based on data from observations, first round of interviews and informal communication, it emerged that experiences related to newness and adaptation were at play too, plus they impacted on the participants’ self-employment trajectory. Examples of these initial emergent codes included “feeling ‘disabled’ by minority status”, “safety support nets” and “affable yet distant locals”.

In order to understand these emerging concepts better, the literature in the area of cross-cultural adaptation was additionally examined as part of a “top down” approach. This literature helped to explain how and why cross-cultural experiences interacted positively or negatively with early venture creation efforts. These emerging concepts were subsequently

Participant observations (ON)

The first author conducted observation as a participant (Denzin and Lincoln, 2017) on a 20-week “Start your own business” enterprise program aimed at immigrant nascent entrepreneurs (total of 60 h). The course covered all necessary parts of starting a business with emphasis on local-specific formal and informal rules of business conduct. Detailed notes were taken at each session of the course, particularly regarding the content and interaction between the participants and trainers. Observational notes and reflections were recorded after each session and used to gather detail on individuals’ backgrounds, interactions and progress (160 pages in total of notes and reflections)

Qualitative interviewing (INT)

16 interviews consisting of two rounds of semi-structured interviews. The themes for interviews were developed from emerging concepts stemming from observations, informal communication and concepts from literature. The first set of interviews took place 3 months after the completion of the enterprise program (5/6 participants with an exception of Lietus and 2 course instructors) and the second round (all 6 participants) five months later, a gap that allowed for the participants’ entrepreneurial and cross-cultural journeys to evolve. Each interview lasted between 50–165 min. Emerging concepts and themes were verified with the participants during both interviews. Data was used to gather in-depth understanding of participants’ backgrounds and their start-up and cross-cultural adaptation experiences. (48 pages of interview notes in total)

Ongoing informal communication (IC)

Informal discussions were conducted with each participant throughout the data generation period to “observe” participants experiences in a more informal way and to build trust. These interactions included informal personal group meetings (2), individual informal meetings (3), conversations before and after the enterprise program classes, telephone calls and text messages (154), electronic communication (200 emails and 26 Skype conversations). Summary notes of informal communication and written informal communication were analysed through NVivo gaining further insights into each participant’s character, positive and negative experiences over time. This data further refined emerging concepts

Table 2.
Data generation
sources and use in data
analysis

explored in more detail and verified in the second round of interviews and informal communication. The second order concepts were thus a combination of inductive and deductive reasoning. Personal characteristics that were observed, attributes and how the individuals responded to different situations became “individual sense-making attributes”. The enabling/constraining dynamics were reflected by the “+” and “-” signs that were used to show individual and context-specific experiences and their impact. For example, interactions with social networks could either propel an individual to action or cause them to be cautious or temporarily withdraw from the nascent entrepreneurship process.

To ensure confidence in terms of credibility, validity, dependability, confirmability and transferability, the procedures advocated by Lincoln and Guba (1985) and Denzin and Lincoln (2017) were followed. These included triangulation of different research tools (observations, interviews and informal communications) to ensure validity and consistency of emerging concepts, verification of emerging concepts with the participants, evidence of transparency of the analytical process in NVivo, regular peer reviews of emerging concepts, and keeping of a reflective diary. Although the first author was predominantly involved in data analysis, interpretive validity was achieved by regular discussion of findings with academic peers and resolving any interpretation discrepancies together.

Findings

Cross-cultural adaptation

The primary aim of the study was to explore how cross-cultural adaptation interacted with the early nascent entrepreneurial attempts of the participants. The analysis identified four key themes (individual sense-making attributes; imagined and real journeys transcending spaces; paradoxical social networks; and dynamic cultural identities) which are illustrated through quotes in Table 3 and thereafter discussed in greater detail.

- (1) *Individual sense-making attributes* – while some of the attributes (such as the level of education, previous entrepreneurial experience, career paths in home country and observed personal characteristics) were deeply rooted and presented a background to the observed cross-cultural and entrepreneurial experiences, others (such as communication competencies or career paths in host country) continued to evolve during the empirical investigation. The analysis revealed both confirmation and contrary results in relation to the literature and conventional wisdom. In contrast to previous research (e.g. Kim, 2001), the data suggested that having higher levels of education did not necessarily translate into easier cross-cultural adaptation. However, previous entrepreneurial and work experiences (whether positive or negative) acted as a driving force towards self-employment. For example, Lietus had a negative experience in his home country: “I had [a] bookkeeper who did not have much experience, so my taxes were not paid correctly for nearly five years and I did not know . . . [I had] to pay a huge bill. But I had not that kind of money, so I lost everything. I lost all my property and everything I had”. Despite this negative experience, followed by work as a construction labourer in the UK to repay his debts, Lietus still wanted to be self-employed: “I start to feel that I want my own business here. I’ve tasted it before, and I cannot forget, so it’s very difficult for me to work for somebody else, so this is mostly the reason why I would like to have my own business”.

The participants’ career paths in their home countries had often been interrupted and they followed a similar pattern in the host country. Monika’s experience of “job hopping” at home and abroad (“I changed the company I worked for 3 times in the last 1½ years and [then] I said I do not want to be an employee anymore”), and changing jobs in the host country – ranging from working as an architect to working as a waitress for cash – both enabled and

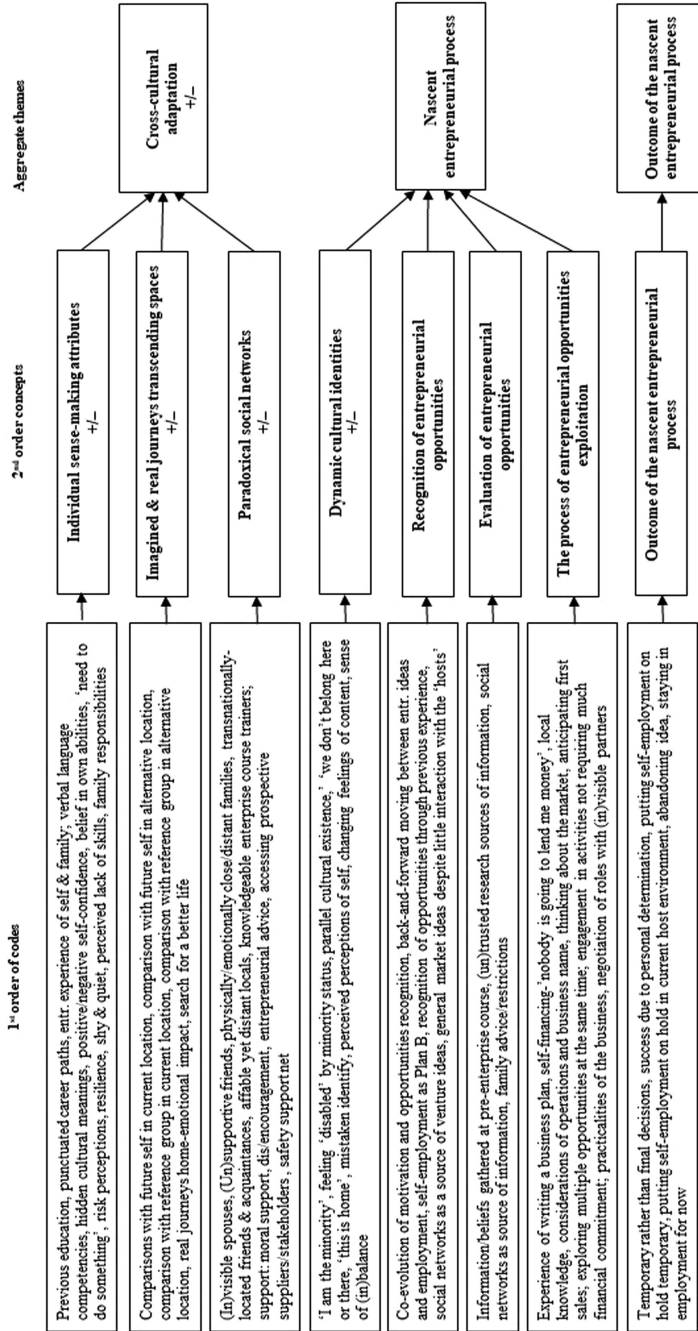


Figure 1.
Data generation –
coding structure

Description	Illustrative quotes
<p><i>Individual sense-making attributes</i> The characteristics and capabilities of individuals that were observed at play: punctuated career paths, entrepreneurial background, language competencies, hidden cultural meanings, observed personal characteristics (self-confidence, belief in own abilities) and how these evolved and were demonstrated throughout the research process</p>	<p>“... you may decide that you are not going to be poor your parent’s way. And how do you do that, through your hard work, determination to succeed”. (Obusi, INT1) It took her a while to realize that when a native person said that they would get back to her, she took their word for it and was surprised when they did not. She said that some other nationality would tell you “no” straight away, but the natives tell you “yes, I’ll get back to you”, even though they never intend to. (Pamela, ONs)</p>
<p><i>Imagined and real journeys transcending spaces</i> Comparisons with future self in current/alternative location, comparisons with others in current location/ alternative location, impact of journeys home</p>	<p>“I think I’m sick and tired of living away from home. Trying to defend yourself, trying to explain yourself all the time. It’s getting worse now” (Pamela, INT2) “I talk to them but still it’s not the same because I cannot, you do not have the same problems and you know it’s not the same country, you cannot say like what has happened to me because they would not understand. It’s not the same situation ...”(Lisa, INT1) “they [friends at home] are interested in how I’m living here” (Monika, INT1)</p>
<p><i>Paradoxical social networks</i> These could be divided into: close family in host country, family in home country, friends in home/ other country, host members. Close family is providing conditional support while those networks that could provide resources were underexplored with a distance kept between participants and natives</p>	<p>“I’m not in good mood at all, we have been experiencing constant racial attacks where we live, so I’m too scared to leave my wife and children alone in the house[...]. My car was smashed, and they also came trying to attack me and a family friend right in my front garden. However, we have since been going out to view houses. As soon as everything is sorted I will let you guys know” ... (Obusi, IC) ... everybody says oh Nigerians are this, Nigerians are that, but take one man to begin a change, if you, if you live your life differently you do not have to talk people will know you are different. They probably have met several other people from Nigeria? [...] we Nigerians know that some of us are terrible. Some do not like to work but they want to live good, well then it depends on your family, family background, your upbringing ... (Obusi/INT1) Interviewer: You have been here for 7 years now and do you feel at home? Pamela: ... outside my house, no, inside my house, yes. (Pamela/INT2) ... maybe it was too much for me for being abroad from a different culture, always everyday the same differences, you know what I mean. Oh again, again, yeah they are like that ... (Monika/INT2)</p>

(continued)

Table 3.
Cross-cultural
adaptation themes

Description	Illustrative quotes
<p><i>Dynamic cultural identities</i> This theme reflects the participants' changing perceptions of their cultural identities within a new host country. Four different dynamic cultural identity positions were adopted at different times and specific situations: (1) "I am the minority", (2) parallel cultural existence, (3) "we do not belong here or there", and (4) "this is home"</p>	<p><i>"I'm not in good mood at all, we have been experiencing constant racial attacks where we live, so I'm too scared to leave my wife and children alone in the house[. . .]My car was smashed, and they also came trying to attack me and a family friend right in my front garden. However, we have since been going out to view houses. As soon as everything is sorted I will let you guys know . . . (Obusi, IC)</i></p> <p><i>. . . everybody says oh Nigerians are this, Nigerians are that, but take one man to begin a change, if you, if you live your life differently you do not have to talk people will know you are different. They probably have met several other people from Nigeria? [. . .] we Nigerians know that some of us are terrible. Some do not like to work but they want to live good, well then it depends on your family, family background, your upbringing . . . (Obusi/INT1)</i></p> <p>Interviewer: <i>You have been here for 7 years now and do you feel at home?</i>Pamela: <i>. . . outside my house, no, inside my house, yes. (Pamela/INT2)</i></p> <p><i>. . . maybe it was too much for me for being abroad from a different culture, always everyday the same differences, you know what I mean. Oh again, again, yeah they are like that . . . (Monika/INT2)</i></p>

Table 3.

constrained her entrepreneurial aspirations. Consistent with the entrepreneurship literature (e.g. Dilani *et al.*, 2014), certain human capital constructs (such as previous relevant skills, work experience and previous entrepreneurial experience) seemed to play a critical role in an individual's drive to pursue nascent entrepreneurial opportunities. The fact that some of the participants' parents were self-employed also made taking their own entrepreneurial steps in the host country easier, such as Lisa who knew what self-employment involved and Sebastian whose parents provided emotional and practical support to him.

Communication has been highlighted as a key element in cross-cultural adaptation (Berry, 2008; Kim, 2008, 2017). The analysis found that the level of communication capabilities, the lack of interaction with the natives and the over-reliance on communication with their own co-migrant community in the host country, resulted in communication difficulties for some of the participants, which in turn constrained their cross-cultural and nascent entrepreneurial experiences. During informal communication at the enterprise program, Pamela talked about her frustration with hidden cultural meanings as it took her some time to realize that when [the native] person said that they would get back to her, she took their word for it and was surprised she did not hear back from them. She said that some other nationalities would tell you "no" straight away, but [the native] tell you "yes, I'll get back to you", even though they never intend to do this. Lisa also displayed her lack of confidence in communicating in English and a feeling of displacement when communicating with the natives – ". . . sometimes I find it very difficult to understand, as well when they [the natives] speak very fast". Such experiences seemed to push the participants away from communicating with the natives and diminished the opportunities to learn these hidden cultural meanings (Berry, 2005; Kim, 2001) which presented ongoing communication barriers for all of the participants when they encountered the members of the host population during their nascent entrepreneurial journeys.

The participants' observed personal characteristics (such as self-confidence, belief in their own abilities, their drive to "do something" and risk-taking) interrelated with their cross-cultural and nascent entrepreneurial experiences in both positive and negative ways (Kim, 2001; Ram *et al.*, 2017; Kushnirovich *et al.*, 2018). Female participants verbalized their lack of self-confidence and questioned their abilities more than the male participants. Lisa openly declared that "*I'm not very confident*", which also came across in other observations, whereas Obusi was determined to succeed: "*... good things do not come easily. So if I want to make a good go out of this place, I need to put in action*". All participants shared a drive to do something which positively enabled their entrepreneurial efforts. But these entrepreneurs were only prepared to take certain risks because they often felt that they lacked a social safety-net if things went wrong, as explained by Monika: "*... things change very fast. I do not have the kind of relationships that from the time I would feel I am not alone, anything happens*".

- (2) *Imagined and real journeys transcending spaces* – the physical movements between the spaces were characteristic of the participants' movements between their home countries and host country which offered an emotional boost or perceived increased distance (Lee, 2014; Kim, 2015; Pruthi *et al.*, 2018). The imaginary journeys involved the underlying motives, future aspirations, sacrifices and ongoing negotiations, and acted as accelerators and brakes as the participants constantly re-evaluated and justified their position relative to alternative options. The participants often compared themselves to their peers. As Sebastien pointed out: "*I know some friends there [France] and I know their position and they are struggling for a living... to find a job and when they do, it's very low salaries [...]; I would not go back there*". Lietus wanted to stay because after his business failure at home, he wanted a new start and a better life. Such constant comparisons often reassured them that trying to become self-employed in the host country (despite the significant challenges involved) was preferable to the alternative options available to them. Even though the underlying dynamics were often complex, the imagined movements between the current and alternative spaces often acted as a positive force in their entrepreneurial pursuit towards achieving better lives.
- (3) *Paradoxical social networks* – the depth and nature of the interactions with the different social network types (see Table 2) depended on the level of perceived commonalities which (excepting a nuclear family) changed over time (Nee and Sanders, 2001; Ram *et al.*, 2008; Light and Dana, 2013; Bird and Wennberg, 2016). The intensity of interactions and supports that the participants drew from these networks also ranged from the nuclear family providing the strongest and most consistent support over time, to the lowest engagement and perceived support from host community networks. The nuclear family provided a sense of familiarity and belonging in an unfamiliar environment, but the traditional gender roles (of mothers as child-bearers and fathers as breadwinners) resonated throughout the participants' responses. Obusi pointed out: "*I'm the man in the home. I'm the one who needs to go out and bring in food on the table*", while male partners were also the key decision-makers, even with the female entrepreneurs. Apart from emotional support, family members also provided advice and skills as Pamela's husband was going to provide accounting advice, Obusi's wife was going to work in the business as he could not afford to pay anyone at the start, and Sebastian's parents were going to help with logistics. While familial connections remained important, they tended not to facilitate easier cross-cultural adaptation.

The participants generally sought out other members of their own communities and those of other immigrant communities to experience a sense of cultural togetherness until they

reached a certain saturation point. Monika spoke about how she had to make compromises initially because *“I am here and I do not know many people. We are friends. I do not say it’s a pain or something, it’s just different. I was more selective at home than here”*, but later mentioned that she had met another Hungarian engineer and that she was now looking for more of that kind of person to be part of her social contacts. Social networks comprising of acquaintances in home/third countries provided potential business partners for new venture ideas for some of the participants. Lietus was planning to co-operate with a jewellery maker from Mongolia who was recommended by his friend and Sebastien was considering three different partnerships with acquaintances from Belgium and France in addition to involving his parents.

All participants maintained a relative distance from the natives. Social encounters with the natives were viewed as somewhat daunting experiences and mostly entailed functional, surface level relationships (such as in workplaces) which did not extend beyond the work context. Some did not actually approach prospective suppliers or clients as anticipation of rejection was too strong. As Lisa stated: *“You would trust more somebody from your country [. . .], it’s because if you’re in your country and somebody from outside arrives, it’s more difficult to trust them”*. Similarly, while Pamela recognized the need to establish connections with the natives, she could not see how she would overcome this difficulty: *“I did not know until [course facilitator] said that here it’s not just enough being good at something, you need to have the right network. So, you are already dealing with a lot of stumbling blocks there (when you are talking about networks) because I do not know anybody, and if I did, I do not know if I would go and ask them. [. . .]. I do not think any immigrant entrepreneur can survive in [name of host country] without networks unless he is doing business with his own”*. Although the enterprise program facilitator was well-meaning in his encouragement of networking, it acted the opposite way and almost intimidated the participants regarding establishing local relationships. This constrained positive cross-cultural adaptation as interaction with the locals not only supports cross-cultural adaptation (Kim, 2001), but also enhances the development of new business start-ups (Davidsson and Honig, 2003).

- (4) *Dynamic cultural identities* – individual cultural identities were observed to fluctuate as they were continuously engaged in an adaptive tension between the old and new (Kim, 2001, 2017; Bhatia and Ram, 2009; Lee, 2014). The participants sought to achieve a sense of balance in an unpredictable environment, in which they experienced the conflicting pull of the familiar and the unfamiliar as they engaged in the process of becoming entrepreneurs in a new country (which was inevitably reflected in that process). Their cultural identities floated dynamically between diverse cultural spaces and times (Bhatia and Ram, 2009; Konig, 2009), in line with the concept of adaptive tensions and intercultural personhood (Kim, 2001, 2017) rather than representing a constant state (Berry, 2005).

While an individual could sometimes feel at ease in the new socio-cultural context, at other times the same person could feel that they did not belong there. Cultural identity as a minority seemed to act as a self-erected barrier against successful cross-cultural adaptation and the successful exploitation of nascent entrepreneurial opportunities. Monika often spoke of feeling *“disabled”* by her foreign status. Another cultural identity of a parallel cultural existence was also adopted with elements from both host and home cultures present. Sebastien worked and lived with people of different nationalities and engaged with his transnationally located acquaintances to advance his new venture creation process. A third observed form of cultural identity took a form of a feeling of belonging nowhere – a temporal personal struggle to belong, rather than feeling stuck in-between cultural identities, not fully belonging to either of them as Lisa articulated: *“I feel like we do not belong here or there . . .*

you're not part of here or you're not part of there. It's like being in two places . . ." Finally, a cultural identity of feeling at ease with the new environment transferred into participants having increased confidence in their entrepreneurial abilities and having somewhat increased interactions with local social networks. Obusi expressed that he often felt at home: *"This is my home. I have been [feeling] home most part of my life. Now I'm in a new home. And for now, this is home. There is no other home anywhere."*

These four themes of cross-cultural adaptation highlight the positive and negative experiences faced by immigrants in adapting to their host country. The analysis also highlights the dynamic nature of cross-cultural adaptation and how this can oscillate from positive to negative, depending on the nature of the situation for an individual. However, the data suggests that those immigrants who had prior start-up experience (either in their home or host country) had developed social networks, had undertaken some degree of cultural adaptation, were effective communicators, were not engaged in frequent imagined journeys to their home or third country, were more likely to engage proactively in the nascent entrepreneurial process.

Nascent entrepreneurial process

Having analysed experiences of cross-cultural adaptation, each participant's experiences of their nascent entrepreneurial process were also investigated. The analysis focuses on three key themes (recognition of entrepreneurial opportunity; evaluation of nascent entrepreneurial opportunities; and exploitation of nascent entrepreneurial opportunities) and thereafter outcomes of the nascent entrepreneurial process are highlighted, all of which are illustrated through quotes in [Table 4](#) and then discussed in greater detail.

- (1) *Recognition of entrepreneurial opportunities* – all participants gave the anticipated positive future benefits of self-employment as their rationale during the opening session of the enterprise program. Continuous interaction with the participants revealed more underlying motives as self-employment was perceived as an alternative form of economic adaptation as they felt that issues such as discrimination may not allow them to maximize their economic potential within a host organization as in Pamela's case *"I would not join a junior position. So, that might force me to go into self-employment because nobody is going to [. . .] give me the job at a senior level"*. Sebastien was the only participant who showed mostly positive motivation: *"I wanted to do something different because I was really bored with my work . . . To get more money. To get more challenge"*.

Entrepreneurial opportunities were mostly recognized through the participants' human capital, such as work experience and previous entrepreneurial experience ([Baron, 2006](#)), and through social capital such as interactions with those in their home or other countries ([Walsh and Martin, 2021](#); [Davidsson and Honig, 2003](#)). As outlined in [Table 1](#), 16 out of 17 business ideas were intended for a general or mixed market rather than exclusively focusing on serving the needs of the co-immigrant markets ([Ram et al., 2008](#); [Lassmann and Busch, 2015](#)). While most participants' businesses proposed to serve the needs of the general/mixed markets in the host environment, some proposed transnational operations. This intended focus on the general/mixed markets was a somewhat surprising finding given there was very little interaction with the host community at the nascent phase.

- (2) *Evaluation of entrepreneurial opportunities* – all participants used the Internet to gather information for their business (such as details about their target market and business formalities), while another strategy for evaluating entrepreneurial ideas was the utilisation of social networks. Each participant consulted with the enterprise program facilitators about the validity of their business ideas, seeing them as a

Description	Illustrative quotes
<p><i>Recognition of entrepreneurial opportunities</i> Ongoing process as the participants recognized entrepreneurial ideas while also moving back and forward between employment and nascent entrepreneurial pursuit. Self-employment often seen as a Plan B in search of a better life. Recognition of entrepreneurial opportunities mainly through previous experience and social networks. The opportunities were mostly to be located within general rather than co-immigrant markets despite little interaction with the locals</p>	<p><i>"I have two options. If I cannot get a job then I should get myself self-employed, you know."</i> (ON/INT2) <i>"I wanted to do something different. Because I was really bored with my work, maybe . . . To get more money. To get more challenge. That's the reason".</i> (SF/INT1) Monika also anticipated how she could fit her self-employment around her future family responsibilities by hiring enough employees (ONE20) <i>"My business idea was to open a hairdresser shop . . . I had this idea since I was a young girl. I love cutting hairs, styling hairs. So, I did that for all my family and then in my country I did a course as well for hairdressing."</i> (Lisa, INT1) Interviewer: And how did you find this idea? Sebastien: <i>It's a Friend from Belgium [. . .] A friend from Belgium who is very, very good at computing and all these kinds of things. So, I partner with him on this business.</i> (Sebastien, INT2)</p>
<p><i>Evaluation of nascent entrepreneurial opportunities</i> Considerations of business ideas, their valuations and re-evaluations based on research through trusted sources of social networks and less trusted other research</p>	<p><i>" . . . you have to have everything ready and . . . it's more accountability if you have your own business. It's more difficult."</i> (Lisa, INT1) Obusi: Initially I thought we could run it from home but when we now find out that I could not so he [Emerge trainer] said I should go and find out how much it costs and put it to my calculation, but I've not done that obviously because where is the money (Obusi, INT1)</p>
<p><i>Exploitation of nascent entrepreneurial opportunities</i> Ongoing process of exploitation of opportunities via gathering resources, structured gestation activities during enterprise program, exploring multiple opportunities at the same time, impediments relating to finance and cross-cultural adaptation (above)</p>	<p><i>. . . he was interested by me because he knew that I have experience as well. He is younger, younger than me. I have experience in business. So, he's very good at Internet thing, he can build sites and . . . marketing aspect . . .</i> (Sebastien, INT1) Interviewer: So, on this website do you have your contact details there? People can purchase from it? Monika: <i>Yes, at the time. But I should develop it. I cannot, I have to learn it first how to order easily. You know, because now at this time they have to write me, send me an email and we will discuss it. But you know I cannot do those classic order shop sites.</i> (Monika, INT2)</p>

(continued)

Table 4.
Nascent entrepreneurial process and outcomes themes

Table 4.

Description	Illustrative quotes
<p><i>Outcomes of the nascent entrepreneurial process</i></p> <p>These were temporary rather than final decisions about the direction of start-up. These included putting self-employment on hold in current host environment, abandoning a particular idea, continuing with start-up efforts and putting nascent entrepreneurial efforts on hold in host country with a view of exploring the opportunity elsewhere</p>	<p><i>"Imagine, I will have 2 beading students at the weekend! Moreover, I can take part on 2 Craft Fairs! Why didn't this come to my mind earlier!" (Monika, IC)</i></p> <p><i>:"I would like to set up the basis and set up all this first, to make sure that I can . . . I can survive with this." (Sebastien, INT2)</i></p> <p><i>"We'll see, we'll just wait and see what will happen . . . just the market you know, it's so scary now. I do not know, I do not even know where I am going to be." (Pamela, INT2)</i></p> <p>Interviewer: So, what has been happening to your business ideas?</p> <p><i>Lisa: . . . I am not thinking actually at the moment for a business. Only if I go back in my country, that would be then an idea</i></p> <p>Interviewer: So, you completely gave up all of your . . .</p> <p><i>Lisa: Here, yeah. At the moment. It's very difficult here actually. (Lisa, INT2)</i></p>

trusted validation route. For example, observation notes show that Pamela often sought approval for the development of her business ideas from course trainers before or after classes. Generally, the reasons for abandoning or changing business ideas included varying levels of motivation/commitment, external environmental changes (economic recession), lack of financial capital to exploit a specific idea further, and a lack of confidence in their own skills. Notes from conversations with Monika show a lack of her professional confidence in establishing an energy certification consultancy business: *"I said [researcher] that it was a good idea to approach the [name of professional organisation mentioned by enterprise program facilitator], but she said that she would not have the confidence to do it at all . . . I asked her why not as she could be the expert, but she said again that she would not feel she is [the expert] even though she knows the stuff"*. The constructs involved in the cross-cultural adaptation dimension (such as individual sense-making attributes described above) also played enabling/constraining roles here.

- (3) *Exploitation of entrepreneurial opportunities* – all individuals were engaged to some extent in the relevant gestation activities: enterprise program participation, business plan preparation, financial capital considerations, validation of business ideas, development of business relationships and development of a business name. Only those who started their businesses during the study pursued operations development, development of marketing and distribution, business formalities and first sale activities (see Table 5).

While the enterprise program participation gave people the opportunity to either acquire new business skills and capabilities or to adapt their existing ones to the host environment, some aspects of the program had negative impacts on these entrepreneurs. The importance of networking in the host country was highlighted on numerous occasions, but the participants' negative experiences of encountering local people during their cross-cultural adaptation meant that they felt intimidated rather than encouraged by the prospect of networking. With regards to financial capital, all participants relied only on the limited resources that they had

accumulated alone or with their spouses, rather than utilising any other resources from other social networks or financial institutions (some participants believed that banks would not give them money). As Pamela explained: “*I am not going to any bank; nobody is going to give me any money anyway*”. Neither of the participants who eventually launched their businesses completed a business plan (Honig and Karlsson, 2004), or had much in the way of financial investment, but both increased their engagement in gestation activities towards the end of the process (Lichtenstein *et al.*, 2007).

During the nascent entrepreneurial process, the participants moved between recognising, evaluating and exploiting entrepreneurial opportunities, and this process was continuously affected by the enabling and constraining tensions stemming from the cross-cultural adaptation. The fact that these entrepreneurs were immigrants meant that their experiences were distinctive from native entrepreneurs who do not have to face the challenges of having to accommodate the intricacies of a new language, work across networks of different nationalities, deal with fluidity of cultural identity issues between old and new cultures, engage in real and imagined journeys across transcending spaces and appreciate the cultural and commercial nuances of their adopted country.

Outcomes of nascent entrepreneurial process

As discussed previously, participants came to several outcomes by the end of the study period of 18 months. These five outcomes were specific to the actual exploitation processes rather than to the individual nascent entrepreneurs. In other words, while one business idea

	Obusi	Monika	Sebastien	Pamela	Lisa	Lietus
<i>Nascent activity</i>						
Devoted 35+ hours/week on business						
Arranged childcare						
Saved money to invest	X	X	X	X	X	X
Asked for funding						
Established credit with suppliers			X			
Invested own money		X	X			
Hired employees/managers						
Organized team	X		X	X	X	X
Prepared business plan	X			X	X	
Developed model or procedures of product/service	X	X	X	X		
Applied for copyright, patent, trademark						
Purchased, rented or leased major equipment						
Defined market opportunity	X	X	X	X	X	X
Developed financials	X	X	X	X	X	
Started marketing and promotion		X	X			
Purchased raw materials, supplies		X	X			
Took a class on starting a business	X	X	X	X	X	
Opened business bank account			X			
<i>Start-up indicators</i>						
Received money, income or fees		X	X			
Positive cash flow		X	X			
Paid managers who are owners a salary						
Filed taxes						
Business phone listing						
Business phone line						

Table 5. Gestation activities undertaken and indicators of start-up during study period

Note(s): Activities and indicators drawn from Reynolds (2000)

could be abandoned, the same individual often pursued another at the same time or subsequently. Lietus abandoned his jewellery shop business idea and he put opening a restaurant temporarily on hold. While most of them are consistent with previously identified typologies (e.g. Carter *et al.*, 1996; Lichtenstein *et al.*, 2007), putting nascent entrepreneurial efforts on hold in host country with a view of revisiting the same idea upon returning to their home country has not been considered in prior research due to the lack of qualitative studies in nascent immigrant entrepreneurship (Davidsson, 2006; Jones *et al.*, 2012). Some participants were not prepared to continue trying to exploit their entrepreneurial ideas in an unfamiliar environment – as Lisa said about her restaurant business idea: “*I am not actually thinking [of starting a business] at the moment. Only if I go back to my country, then it might be an idea.*” Pursuing the same business opportunity in one’s home country may not be appropriate, as a market may not exist within that country for such a venture, so in many ways the nascent entrepreneurial process would need to begin again, but on this occasion without the influence of cross-cultural adaptation.

The themes that emerged during data analysis represent the various stages of the nascent entrepreneurial process that an immigrant may experience. On occasion an immigrant may move forward, but then take a step back while they start pursuing a new business idea or re-evaluating their existing business idea.

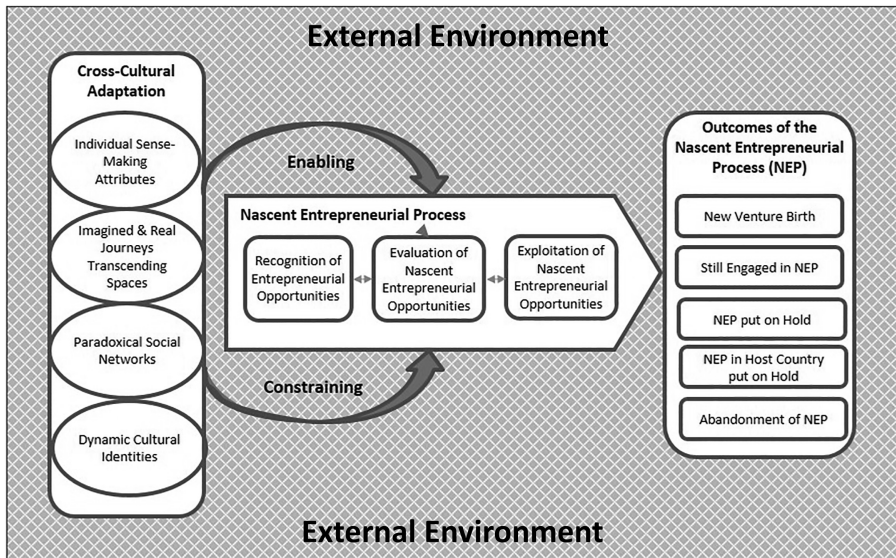
Discussion

The data analysis demonstrated how the process of cross-cultural adaptation is closely intertwined with the nascent entrepreneurial journey of the study participants. The positive and negative tensions became evident within the cross-cultural adaptation themes with their enabling and constraining influences on nascent entrepreneurial efforts. This is presented in a conceptual model (Figure 2) linking the themes of cross-cultural adaptation and nascent entrepreneurship, and showing the context and time specific tensions between them.

Figure 2 uniquely captures the complexities of the nascent entrepreneurial process and cross-cultural adaptation and contributes to the academic debate within the area of immigrant entrepreneurship. Each of the cross-cultural adaptation themes interacts with new venture efforts in an enabling or constraining way that is individual and situation specific. For example, Pamela’s lack of self-confidence (individual sense-making attributes), her negative comparisons of her life in the host country (imagined and real journeys transcending spaces), avoidance rather than initiation of contact with natives despite attempting to start a business in the main market (paradoxical social networks), and her cultural identify of feelings of not belonging (dynamic cultural identity) constrained her nascent entrepreneurial efforts resulting in an abandoned nascent entrepreneurial process. On the other hand, Sebastien had generally more positive experiences regarding cross-cultural adaptation and although he did not interact with the natives very often, he was able to compensate for it by tapping into his transnational social networks which enabled him to successfully achieve new venture birth. Monika’s cross-cultural experiences were mixed, with a lack of confidence in her own abilities (individual sense-making attributes) in building necessary local social networks for her energy consultancy idea. However, despite these constraints, she was able to overcome some of the cross-cultural adaptation difficulties by relying on her own abilities to expand her hobby and start a beading and jewellery making business.

The conceptual model presents a novel contribution to the academic debate and answers Singh and DeNoble’s (2004) call for greater understanding of cross-cultural adaptation and entrepreneurship experiences of immigrants in a new environment. Viewing these intertwined experiences and the enabling/constraining dynamics paint a more fine-grained picture of the experiences of a nascent immigrant entrepreneur during the early stages of venture creation. The dynamic and temporally specific tensions are played out as the participants attempted to

Figure 2. Conceptual model of the interplay between nascent immigrant entrepreneurial process and cross-cultural adaptation



find their own place within the host environment in both economic and socio-cultural senses. The analysis of the data also highlights that staggered progress (“one step forward, two steps back”) rather than linear paths were characteristic of these intertwined journeys of cross-cultural adaptation and nascent entrepreneurship. This perspective differs from the prevailing understanding which views immigrants choosing entrepreneurship because of group cultural predispositions and blocked employment mobility in their host environments (Aliaga-Isla and Rialp, 2013). The analysis was also able to demonstrate sensitivity to historical context (Ram et al., 2017), given that this research took place in a country which lacks a history of immigrant economies and enclaves. The acculturation experiences of immigrant entrepreneurs may differ in countries with longer historical immigration experiences.

The findings of this analysis contribute to the academic debate about the reasons why immigrants enter the entrepreneurial process by highlighting the ongoing pursuit of “better lives” by immigrants. Studying nascent immigrant entrepreneurs on an individual level at the early stages of their cross-cultural adaptation experiences in a contemporary super-diversity and globalized context (Ram et al., 2013; Vertovec, 2017; Kim, 2017) with little history of immigration generates a fresh and informative perspective on such experiences. The analysis has found that the enabling/constraining tensions identified in the cross-cultural adaptation domain interacted with immigrants’ nascent entrepreneurial experiences, so that:

Proposition 1a. There is a dynamic interplay between immigrants’ cross-cultural adaptation and their nascent entrepreneurial process.

Proposition 1b. Tensions in cross-cultural adaptation tensions interact with the entrepreneurial process of immigrant entrepreneurs.

The findings have led to conclusions that are consistent with the extant literature on the nascent entrepreneurial process. Furthermore, the empirical results suggest that conceptual approaches developed in the general nascent entrepreneurship domain can be applied to studying early start-up efforts by immigrants. The qualitative methodological approach adopted here enabled the authors to uncover what happens during the recognition,

evaluation and exploitation of entrepreneurial opportunities under specific considerations of context and time, making another valuable contribution.

The notion of the development and negotiation of entrepreneurial capital during the nascent entrepreneurial process is also useful in explaining what happens during such processes, and how and why it happens. Under the tensions of cross-cultural adaptation, the immigrant entrepreneurs negotiated and leveraged different forms of capital (such as using human and social capital to overcome lack of financial capital) as they recognized, evaluated and exploited specific entrepreneurial opportunities. The analysis shows that, while these entrepreneurs aspired to serve the needs of mixed markets, they were unable to establish and utilize appropriate social connections locally. Contradicting (to an extent) frequently highlighted benefits of the use of different social networks during cross-cultural adaptation and nascent immigrant entrepreneurship, this study revealed that potentially useful interactions with the host community were not developed because of setbacks experienced during cross-cultural adaptation. On the other hand, the power of co-immigrant networks in supporting immigrant entrepreneurship was limited and it did not go beyond emotional support, advice and anticipated labour during the nascent entrepreneurial stage. Transnational social networks mostly provided emotional support and were used to support or weaken conviction in the pursuit of entrepreneurship. However, in one case, they were successfully used to instigate a business partnership.

Proposition 2. Immigrant entrepreneurs negotiate and leverage different forms of capital during the nascent entrepreneurial process with cross-cultural adaptation impacting on the early start-up experiences.

An important aspect of studying the nascent entrepreneurial process is determining what happens once entrepreneurial opportunities have been exploited to some degree. This study uncovers the process of “*becoming*” an entrepreneur and so it also shines a light on those nascent immigrant entrepreneurial attempts that did not progress to a start-up stage. The analysis identifies a new potential outcome of this process which is “putting nascent entrepreneurial efforts on hold in the host country with a view to potentially exploiting them in their home country”. This expands the existing typology of outcomes (Reynolds, 2000; Gartner *et al.*, 2004; Lichtenstein *et al.*, 2007) by adding an immigrant-specific dimension. It shows how the challenging experiences of cross-cultural adaptation are reflected in the process of exploiting entrepreneurial opportunities. This leads to an immigrant entrepreneur being unwilling to continue in the host context, whilst still considering whether the specific business opportunity might potentially be successfully exploited in their home country.

Proposition 3. Nascent immigrant entrepreneurs put their entrepreneurial process on hold in the host country due to impediments stemming from cross-cultural adaptation.

Methodologically, the study contributes to the literature by its qualitative, longitudinal research design, as a noticeable lack of such studies was identified (Aliaga-Isla and Rialp, 2013). Davidsson (2005) proposed that the nuances of this elusive process could be uncovered and understood better by using inductive methods. By immersing a researcher in the field for a prolonged time, it was possible to observe the interrelated processes of nascent entrepreneurial activities and cross-cultural adaptation unfolding as they happened. Such in-depth and detailed accounts of the participants’ experiences compliment other research methodologies and add richness to the extant literature on understanding lived experiences during early stages of nascent entrepreneurship. Table 6 expands on the propositions and suggests research questions for future qualitative or quantitative research at individual and collective/multi-level.

Propositions	Individual level	Collective/multi-level
<p>P1a – There is a dynamic interplay between immigrants’ cross-cultural adaptation and their nascent entrepreneurial process</p> <p>P1b – Tensions in cross-cultural adaptation interact with the entrepreneurial process of immigrant entrepreneurs</p>	<p>What elements of cross-cultural adaptation (CCA) are the most salient during nascent entrepreneurial process (NEP)?</p> <p>What is the role of temporal dynamics in CCA and NEP that immigrant entrepreneurs experience?</p> <p>What elements of CCA enable/constrain immigrant entrepreneurs to progress with their NEP?</p> <p>What CCA tensions do race, ethnicity and gender of an immigrant entrepreneur engender and how do these impact on the NEP experience?</p>	<p>How might the dynamics between CCA and NEP vary between entrepreneurs from different backgrounds – race, ethnicity, gender?</p> <p>How are experiences of CCA and NEP different for entrepreneurs in countries with a long-standing history of immigration vs. those without it?</p> <p>How might the CCA experiences of different ethnic groups/gender differ in their relationship with the NEP?</p>
<p>P2 – Immigrant entrepreneurs negotiate and leverage different forms of capital during the nascent entrepreneurial process with cross-cultural adaptation impacting on the early start-up experiences</p>	<p>How does a nascent immigrant entrepreneur access and leverage social and human capital during NEP and what impact does CCA has?</p> <p>How does an immigrant entrepreneur develop local social networks during CCA and NEP, and what are the challenges that they face?</p> <p>How does the development of social capital with host country networks impact an immigrant entrepreneur’s CCA and access to other forms of capital needed during NEP?</p> <p>How does an immigrant entrepreneur compensate for the lack of local entrepreneurial capital during NEP?</p>	<p>How does accessing different forms of capital during NEP differ for those who focus mainly on co-immigrant/transnational capital vs. those who develop and access entrepreneurial capital in a host context?</p> <p>How do CCA experiences of different ethnic groups impact on entrepreneurial capital development during NEP?</p> <p>How can government enterprise policies and initiatives by business network organizations support the relationship between NEP and CCA for immigrants?</p>
<p>P3 – Nascent immigrant entrepreneurs put their entrepreneurial process on hold in the host country due to impediments stemming from cross-cultural adaptation</p>	<p>What are the triggers that re-ignite the entrepreneurial process for an immigrant entrepreneur after putting their NEP on hold due to CCA impediments?</p> <p>Does an immigrant entrepreneur who puts their NEP on hold in their host country re-start it after leaving the host country?</p> <p>Does an immigrant entrepreneur who puts their NEP efforts on hold in their host country re-start the NEP with the same idea?</p>	<p>What role does the specific political, environmental and cultural context play on the decision by immigrant entrepreneurs to put NEP on hold?</p> <p>How can policy address the constraints in CCA within the NEP to achieve more viable start-ups by immigrants?</p> <p>Is it the individual or the environment that causes an immigrant to start their business in a country other than their host country?</p>

Table 6.
Research questions for future research

Conclusions

The focus of this paper was to examine the interplay between nascent immigrant entrepreneurship and cross-cultural adaptation. A thorough analysis of the data generated in this study has unearthed the complexities of the nascent entrepreneurial process as pursued by immigrants. Tracing the experiences of six immigrants over a period of 18 months provided detailed evidence regarding how their ambitions unfold over time and how their entrepreneurial behaviour is influenced by their cross-cultural adaptation. The study also identified an additional potential outcome to the process which was to put the business on hold in the host country and potentially start the business later in their country of origin. By drawing upon the concepts of cross-cultural adaptation and nascent entrepreneurship, this paper has been able to highlight how the cross-cultural adaptation domain dialectically and dynamically intertwined with the process of recognition, evaluation and exploitation of entrepreneurial opportunities by immigrants. Furthermore, a novel framework was presented which explains the relationship between cross-cultural adaptation and nascent entrepreneurship, and this framework offers a platform from which future studies on the relationship can be constructed.

As with any qualitative study, this research has several limitations due to the small number of entrepreneurs examined. The study of six cases over 18 months obviously limits the generalisations that can be drawn from this work and the ability of future quantitative researchers to build from it. However, it should be noted that although there were a small number of cases, a close examination of even one individual's lived experience can yield valuable insights.

The ambition of the authors is that future research will build on this study (see [Table 6](#) for suggested research questions). Combining the theories of cross-cultural adaptation and the nascent entrepreneurship process as developed in this study may be relevant to other contexts where immigration is still quite new (such as some of the post-Communist countries). Future studies carried out in a different context would uncover additional experiences and constructs. It would be interesting to carry out a similar study in more "mature" immigrant contexts with long-standing historical immigration or in a context where assimilation policies prevail. While this study focused on immigrants of different backgrounds and demographic characteristics which added to the richness of understanding of the varied experiences, future studies employing qualitative and longitudinal research design could focus on examining the nascent entrepreneurial efforts of specific cohorts focusing on a particular gender, age or educational background. These could include women, men, members of the same origin, different family status, educational background or age. The results of such studies would add to the emerging conceptual framework on the interplay between nascent immigrant entrepreneurship in cross-cultural adaptation. After further development and identification of important variables and testing of propositions, quantitative studies will be helpful in this area as they will shed a different light into this elusive and still less understood part of an entrepreneurial process ([Davidsson, 2006](#)). Examining other stages of the entrepreneurial process with cross-cultural adaptation experiences in mind could also generate conceptually significant insights, while the question of how this work relates to transitional entrepreneurship also remains open. This study offers insights that add to the body of existing knowledge, but equally it raises many new questions for others to explore.

The findings also possess a practical resonance. While the instructors on the enterprise program consistently highlighted the professional connections located in the host environment as being very important, very little actual interaction and exploitation of these supposedly valuable resources took place amongst the sample. This was found to be a result of a lack of self-confidence on the part of the entrepreneurs which was rooted in cross-cultural adaptation tensions. The research suggests that as part of enterprise support for nascent immigrant entrepreneurs, the course content should place more emphasis on a softer approach and the integration of personal development. It might also be possible to try to facilitate overcoming of

the country-specific obstacles to new business formation so that immigrants would be less likely to decide to abandon their nascent entrepreneurial processes (or to put them on hold in their host country, as seen in this study). The findings also showed that participants tended not to seek external finance because of individual resource constraints. In turn this led to a view that business plan writing was a mechanical task. Without doubt, writing a business plan can help individuals to focus and clarify their thinking, but supporting this activity on a one-to-one basis, while addressing specific needs, would be more beneficial. Creating a “buddy” system where nascent immigrant entrepreneurs could be paired with native nascent entrepreneurs might also provide benefits in terms of expanding social networks and enabling more positive cross-cultural adaptation journeys.

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