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Is home where the heart is? Investigating the relationship between hometown and entrepreneurship

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ABSTRACT

The importance of home and hometown for entrepreneurs has significant implications for entrepreneurial identities, venture success, and broader contextual dynamics. Traditionally, the concept of home in entrepreneurship literature is viewed instrumentally, largely focusing on the unit of dwelling (i.e. premises/house/apartment), the implications of location choices, and their effects on performance. We employ a mobilities lens, broadening the concept of home to the city/town scale of 'hometown', offering a more holistic understanding of what it means for entrepreneurs from various origins and returns. Our qualitative case study in Norwich, UK, provides nuanced theoretical advancements into understanding home beyond materiality and mere location, highlighting how this is inextricably linked to dynamic renewal within peripheral urban places and different migration pathways (i.e. local, migrant, returnee). Our contributions are threefold: 1) we reveal that varying degrees of localness complicate the local versus non-local binary, impacting entrepreneurial dynamics; 2) our relational model of hometown entrepreneurship challenges the rigid leave-learn-return narrative, demonstrating return migration as a complex detach-experience-revalue socio-cultural reconnection which feeds into the local entrepreneurial ecosystem; 3) exploring the interactions of diverse actors in peripheral urban hometowns provides insights into regional development moving us beyond instrumental views in existing literature.

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Entrepreneurship; context; hometown; place; return migration; returnee entrepreneurship

1. Introduction

Home can serve as a symbol of continuity and order, privacy and comfort, security and refuge, carrying meanings of ownership interspersed with family life and often focused on positive affect (Lewicka 2011). While research on the meaning of home has flourished in recent years, it has received limited attention in entrepreneurship research. Existing entrepreneurship studies mainly hold a domicentric focus that home equates to the primary dwelling unit (i.e. premises, house, apartment). Accordingly, extant research has prioritized home-based businesses and gendered entrepreneurial processes within a domicile unit (cf. Carter, Van Auken, and Harms 1992; Hamilton 2013; Mason, Carter, and Tagg 2011), or location choices driven by performance motives (cf. Dahl and Sorenson 2012; Figueiredo, Guimarães, and Woodward 2002), rather than the contextual and experiential meanings of home for entrepreneurs and place. The value that different entrepreneurs place on the emotional, social, and spatial factors of home remain largely unknown, with many discovering their location by chance (Berg 2014). Additionally, the role of how hometown underpins repeated social interactions and maintains local cultures, traditions, and institutions (Dacin et al. 2024) is similarly underexplored. This lacuna is now especially pertinent given the newfound

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significance of home and rising business closures seen within the post-pandemic venturing context (Meers 2023; Zahra 2021) in which non-core regions are increasingly overlooked and intra-regional disparities are sharply rising (Brown and Cowling 2021; Pike et al. 2024; Rodríguez-Pose, Terrero-Dávila, and Lee 2023).

To tackle this research problem, we ask the question: *how is the concept of 'hometown' recounted in entrepreneurial storytelling?* Critically engaging with the everyday entrepreneurial narrative of hometown (Welter et al. 2017), we aim to broaden normative notions of home approaching the concept from the city/town scale. We define hometown as 'a place/site, a set of feelings/cultural meanings, and the relations between the two' (Blunt and Dowling 2006, 10) paying particular attention to 'a person's ... city, esp. viewed as a birthplace, a residence during one's early years, or a place dear to one' (Mallett 2004, 62). We also choose to employ a mobilities perspective on such narrative; deconstructing the motivations underlying individuals' choices to either depart from, remain in, or return to their hometown (Haartsen and Stockdale 2018) can challenge the conventional notion that strong attachments and fixed boundaries invariably anchor people to a specific location (Lewicka 2011). Broadening our focus in this manner offers a more inclusive view of returnee entrepreneurship, capturing diverse motivations beyond elite individuals returning to advanced sectors (Bolzani 2023; Drori, Honig, and Wright 2009; Gruenhagen, Davidsson, and Sawang 2020), incorporating hometown contextual dynamics, and offering valuable perspectives from everyday entrepreneurs' international and internal migration (Lin et al. 2019; Welter et al. 2017).

Our study provides a research insight into the concept of hometown, and more specifically what it *means* to entrepreneurs with varying migratory statuses (i.e. local, migrant, returnee), thus advancing our understanding of hometown beyond mere geographic location or materiality used instrumentally to aid the entrepreneurship process. Through configuring a relational model of hometown entrepreneurship that combines what everyday entrepreneurs call 'degrees of localness' and the 'boomerang effect' we: 1) delve deeper into how the continuum between local and non-local storytelling within a hometown can have notable exclusionary implications for entrepreneurial processes; 2) recognize returnee entrepreneurship to a hometown as a complex detach-experience-revalue socio-cultural reconnection moving its conceptualization beyond traditional economic models while demonstrating how and why these converging dynamics feed into the local entrepreneurial ecosystem; and, 3) how, taken together, these contributions enhance our understanding of change and regional development by revealing how diverse actors coexist within a hometown entrepreneurship model. Exploring such experiential meanings of hometown through entrepreneurial storytelling in a peripheral urban place reveals not just how this impacts upon local business resource accumulation, but also how return migration reinforces a hometown entrepreneurship model, thus disproving that 'home advantage is only effective in rural regions' (Habersetzer et al. 2021, 944).

2. Theoretical background

2.1. Home and entrepreneurship

The concept of home holds significant importance in understanding the dynamics of entrepreneurship. We as people are 'domicentric' – our prototypical place is *home*, serving as a spatial anchor and a 'major fixed reference point for the structuring of reality' (Porteous 1976, 386). In recent years, research on home has proliferated, revealing intractable disputes regarding its essentially contested multi-layered nature (Meers 2023), yet what has been largely left unaccounted for is how such disputes interact with varying entrepreneurial processes within certain spatial contexts.

We draw out three components of home as identified by Blunt and Dowling (2006) and inspired by Gieryn's (2000, 464–465) sociology of place as possessing three crucial characteristics 'geographic location ... material form ... [and] investment with meaning and value' to better understand the ways diverse entrepreneurs (i.e. local, migrant, and returnee) 'do' and feel home (Gurney 1997): 1) home as simultaneously material and imaginative; 2) the nexus between home, power, and identity;

and 3) home as multi-scalar. This approach acknowledges how places are underpinned with repeated social interactions, enabling the emergence and maintenance of local cultures, traditions, and institutions (Dacin et al. 2024) and how such practices are recounted reflects patterns of exclusion, marginalization, and a lack of power (Kimmitt et al. 2024). We extend the boundaries of home to the city/town scale reflecting that ‘home is place but it is also a space inhabited by family, people, things and belongings – a familiar, if not comfortable space where particular activities and relationships are lived’ (Mallett 2004, 63). This in turn allows us to move beyond academic debates bogged down in disputing the ‘internally complex’ and ‘variously describable’ sub-features or processes of home (Baxter and Brickell 2014). Instead, we investigate entrepreneurship viewed through the lens of hometown as a ‘composite concept’ (Meers 2023) – the sum of its diverse internal elements. Considering ‘any researcher engaging with the concept home is faced with the dilemma of how to distil workable principles from such a vast literature’ (Meers 2023, 599) we take guidance from previous studies recommending a micro-meso-macro framework (Dopfer, Foster, and Potts 2004). With this in mind, we seek to clarify the multidimensionality of a hometown context by examining its multi-scalar levels in extant entrepreneurship research e.g. micro-level – the household, meso-level – hometown, and macro-level – nation.

Concerning the micro-level, entrepreneurship literature predominantly focuses on the house as home. Drawing upon the importance of this, research has shown that home-based businesses, which comprise a significant proportion of the UK small business sector, are often ‘invisible’ or operate in the informal economy, leading to misconceptions about their role in local economic development (Mason, Carter, and Tagg 2011). Eddleston and Powell (2012) argue that such businesses facilitate a greater work-family balance, supporting feminist theories that depict entrepreneurship as a gendered process; these home-based ventures tend to be considered as primarily female-owned, personally financed, sole proprietorships (Carter, Van Auken, and Harms 1992; Hamilton 2013) exemplifying the phenomenon of mumpreneurs where women combine experiences of enterprise with motherhood (Duberley and Carrigan 2013). Evidently, home-based entrepreneurship can enhance life-quality through owning and operating a business closely aligned to personal resources, values, and interests (Marcketti, Niehm, and Fuloria 2006) where social, economic, and emotional support from the household is dynamic and integral to entrepreneurial growth (Cogan, Pret, and Cardon 2022). Such entrepreneurship is fuelled by a scope of more personal benefits (Webb, McQuaid, and Rand 2020), facilitated by increasing numbers of remote workers (Zahra 2021), providing happiness and flexibility in work, family, and community roles (McGehee and Kim 2004), whilst helping challenge gender/power relationships (Ahl and Marlow 2021). These studies, however, largely focus on entrepreneurial identities and firm performance, often treating home as an instrumental resource while overlooking the broader contextual dynamics behind such entrepreneurship.

However, as Dovey (1985, 95) emphatically argues, home is always more than a house – it is a lived physical space facilitating an ‘expression of social meanings and identities’ that come together in the meso-level concept of hometown, forming overlapping and interconnected social networks which are spatially embedded. We have long known that entrepreneurship is influenced by the local context, with towns and cities rich with knowledge-based sectors and innovation likely to have a higher propensity for entrepreneurship compared to those without (Audretsch et al. 2012). With this in mind, Michelacci and Silva (2007, 615) argued that the ‘fraction of entrepreneurs who work in the region where they were born is significantly higher than the corresponding fraction for dependent workers’. They claim hometown firms have greater levels of capital and employment compared to their non-local counterparts as the former are better placed to exploit localized financial opportunities, thus explaining, in part, regional entrepreneurial disparity. This relational structure affects and determines a firm’s innovation and capacity (Xavier Molina-Morales and Teresa Martínez-Fernández 2006) meaning in some socially deprived hometown regions, entrepreneurs rely on social and human capital to ‘bootstrap’ (Jayawarna, Jones, and Macpherson 2011). Startup ventures have been found to perform better when located in their founders’ hometown regions because of their richer endowments of regionally embedded social capital reducing upheaval and

geographically varying information costs, thus offering a ‘home-field advantage’ (Dahl and Sorenson 2012; Figueiredo, Guimarães, and Woodward 2002, 341). Habersetzer et al. (2021) accordingly argue that firm growth is positively influenced by home advantage, particularly in rural regions, where native entrepreneurs tend to create more jobs.

Conversely, this means that entrepreneurs who are new to a hometown may face disadvantages in effectively matching products/services with local demand (Cuervo-Cazurra, Maloney, and Manrakhan 2007). Using a meso-level lens, hometown ties influence location decisions (Stam 2007) and maximize entrepreneurial success through local social capital (Habersetzer et al. 2021). Studies suggest entrepreneurs play a positive role in hometown communities, particularly in challenging contexts (Bolzani 2023), driven by a sense of belonging and responsibility and a reluctance to relocate despite better opportunities elsewhere (Redhead and Bika 2022). Nevertheless, such accumulated social capital is context-specific (Dahl and Sorenson 2012), posing challenges for outsiders in rural hometowns (Mayer and Meili 2016) where dense social networks can be difficult to penetrate (Habersetzer et al. 2021). Hometown can therefore be understood as a dynamic process of belonging that underpins relations between home’s material and imaginative realms and entrepreneurial processes.

Moving up to the macro-level, home has been frequently acknowledged as a country or nation particularly within immigrant entrepreneurship research where networks and resources from the entrepreneurs’ home country are used in a host country. Despite its importance, the literature on immigrant entrepreneurship remains fragmented, lacking synthesized models to fully understand this phenomenon (Sundararajan and Sundararajan 2015). Key concepts have emerged, such as family social capital, which supports entrepreneurial opportunities in both host and home countries (Evansluong and Ramírez-Pasillas 2019). The culture of the home country also plays a crucial role in forming social and ethnic networks that motivate new ventures, allowing immigrants to leverage existing capital and aid co-ethnic groups (Dana et al. 2020). Moreover, entrepreneurship can serve as a means of defiance against oppressive conditions in the host country (Al-Dajani et al. 2019). The macro-level notion of home as nation is also significant within the international entrepreneurship literature. Motivations for internationalization are categorized into instrumentally-driven exploitation of resources and psychological perceptions of home or host country conditions, influencing goals to sell more, buy better, upgrade, or escape (Cuervo-Cazurra, Narula, and Un 2015). This transnational perspective assumes a continuous relationship between immigrants and their home countries, creating complex socio-economic networks that span both contexts (Drori, Honig, and Wright 2009). Within this work, the emphasis is very much placed on social ties and how they can be used instrumentally to aid the entrepreneurship process.

To sum up, the micro-meso-macro framework (Dopfer, Foster, and Potts 2004) clarifies how we currently understand the multidimensionality of home within entrepreneurship literature. The *micro-level* literature of home as house focuses on entrepreneurial identities and firm performance, often viewing the concept of home as a means to an end, overlooking broader contextual dynamics that underlie how hometown entrepreneurship works. At the *meso-level*, home as hometown is intricately linked to a sense of belonging, primarily relying on social capital to support entrepreneurial endeavours. However, our understanding is limited, as research largely focuses on location choices as a strategic means to foster entrepreneurship or on altruistic contributions made to hometown communities. At the *macro-level*, home as nation emphasizes transnational networks as instrumental tools facilitating the entrepreneurship process. To address the convergence on the multidimensionality of home, we employ the lens of entrepreneurial storytelling. This lens bridges the gap between physical places and their symbolic meanings in entrepreneurial contexts, providing empirical and theoretical insight into how places become resources and sources of legitimacy for entrepreneurs (Kimmitt et al. 2024; Welter and Baker 2021) and vice versa. This approach offers a compelling way to understand entrepreneurship outside affluent contexts (Lounsbury, Gehman, and Glynn 2019; Welter et al. 2017), where problems are ‘less visible’ and frequently overlooked (Pike et al. 2024; Rodríguez-Pose, Terrero-Dávila, and Lee 2023) by illustrating how entrepreneurs enact and construct a hometown.

2.2. Hometown and entrepreneurial mobility

Considering people are more mobile than ever before, a more nuanced perspective on the relationship between hometown and entrepreneurship can be achieved by understanding the centrality of place in human experience (Dacin et al. 2024; Gieryn 2000). While traditional mobilities literature suggests that mobility increasingly undermines notions of place, neighbourhood, and boundedness (Shucksmith 2012), this emphasis on place as a fixed local entity overlooks its dynamic nature in relation to enterprise (Kimmitt et al. 2024). Investigating the interplay between mobility and hometown appeal more broadly can deconstruct the desire to leave, stay, or return to one's home, challenging the sedentarist tradition which assumes that strong bonds and static boundedness is what ties people to place (Gustafson 2001; Haartsen and Stockdale 2018; Sheller and Urry 2006). We therefore suggest that adopting a critical social constructionist mobility perspective can uncouple hometown from exclusively positive affect (Lewicka 2011) acknowledging that migration and hometown place attachments are not mutually exclusive phenomena (Gustafson 2001). This aligns with recent advancements arguing that an appreciation of mobility aids the conceptualization of place (Dacin et al. 2024) particularly concerning the processes of how newcomers become stayers (Haartsen and Stockdale 2018). Collectively, this approach leads to a more holistic and integrative understanding of place in entrepreneurship research (Dacin et al. 2024; Welter and Baker 2021; Welter, Baker, and Wirsching 2019).

We conceptually underpin our approach with Relph's (1976) theory of 'insidedness' to describe the depth of one's connection to a place, which varies along a continuum: existential insidedness is a deep, authentic bond where place is integral to self-identity; empathetic insidedness provides a meaningful connection developed through understanding and empathy; behavioural insidedness describes a functional, routine engagement without deep emotional attachment; and, incidental insidedness depicts a minimal, superficial connection to a place. In contrast, 'outsidedness' describes feelings of detachment and alienation from a place. Relph's theory pinpoints the importance of place in shaping identity, belonging, power, and meaning, highlighting that places with high insidedness levels can foster stronger, more meaningful connections and enhance the overall quality of life. Adopting this mobilities lens offers insights into 'stability-within-movement' (Sheller and Urry 2006) challenging traditional invariable mobility theories that overlook return migration (Coulter, Ham, and Findlay 2016) and the 'darker side' of home (Gurney 2020). This dynamic view conceptualizes places as both stable backdrops and ever-changing experiences influenced by personal, historical, and cultural contexts (Relph 1976). It offers a nuanced lens to examine how migrant entrepreneurial action, with gradations of insidedness, shapes and is shaped by place, emphasizing the interplay between entrepreneurial action and the reproduction (or lack thereof) of place.

In this context, return migration is increasingly relevant for policymakers as a means of home country economic and social development (Bolzani 2023; Wang 2020), yet it remains underexplored in management and entrepreneurship research (Drori, Honig, and Wright 2009; Gruenhagen, Davidsson, and Sawang 2020). Prior research often focuses on economic aspects, examining how individuals mobilize resources acquired abroad to achieve economic mobility upon return to their hometown (Hagan and Wassink 2020). This approach tends to portray return migration as linear and homogeneous, overlooking the complexities of individuals' life-course trajectories and the micro-level processes encountered upon their return.

Moreover, while some entrepreneurship studies have extended understanding of geographically distant ties (Lin et al. 2019), research often emphasizes nearby networks due to the perceived difficulty of maintaining connections without geographical proximity. This relates to network theory which suggests that ties weaken over time, but certain strong ties can establish lasting connections or remain dormant until reactivated, offering latent knowledge and resources (Williams, Plakoyiannaki, and Krasniqi 2023). However, the reactivation of dormant ties among everyday enterprising individuals remains unexplored. In entrepreneurship, return migration is often framed within the context of 'returnee entrepreneurs'. The observation of returnee entrepreneurship

remains somewhat limited, often portraying individuals as self-initiated elites pursuing economic progress upon reintegration (Battistella 2018; Gruenhagen, Davidsson, and Sawang 2020). This perspective emphasizes economic benefits, innovation, and industry development (Lin et al. 2019; Wang 2020), focusing on skilled actors returning voluntarily to create ventures in advanced sectors (Drori, Honig, and Wright 2009; Liu et al. 2010). Consequently, the broader spectrum of returnee entrepreneurship, particularly involving non-elite actors who return for various reasons, is largely overlooked (Bolzani 2023).

Given everyday entrepreneurs' integral role in national economies (Welter et al. 2017), focusing on elites' instrumental motivations returning from more developed countries (Gruenhagen, Davidsson, and Sawang 2020; Lin et al. 2019) overlooks valuable insights from everyday migrants – both international and internal (and with varying degrees of insidedness) – who contribute to local economic development (Bolzani 2023). This oversight stems from scholars' tendency to renounce such processes as 'mundane' and commonplace, despite their fundamental significance (Welter et al. 2017). Additionally, this approach often emphasizes networks in terms of opportunity exploitation, overshadowing contextual variations and neglecting how heterogeneous embeddedness and social ties contribute to entrepreneurial intentions and mobility (Lin et al. 2019) as well as place-making. Taken together, our understanding remains limited regarding how entrepreneurs from diverse migratory paths construct and enact the material attributes and symbolic meanings of local hometown contexts to create or maintain competitive advantage. With this in mind, our study heeds calls for more in-depth approaches (Qin, Wright, and Gao 2017; Van Burg et al. 2022) investigating broader contexts of migration (Pike et al. 2024; Rodríguez-Pose, Terrero-Dávila, and Lee 2023; Williams, Plakoyiannaki, and Krasniqi 2023) and for expanding perspectives on place-based narratives in everyday entrepreneurial action (Dacin et al. 2024; Kimmitt et al. 2024; Welter, Baker, and Wirsching 2019).

3. Methodology

3.1. The case study

We chose to pursue a holistic, inductive, multi-evidence source qualitative case study design to explore how entrepreneurial processes unfold, engaging with entrepreneurship in a peripheral urban place and using the city as the 'unit of analysis'. This method aligns with previous singular case study research aimed at gaining a deeper understanding of entrepreneurship and place (Redhead and Bika 2022; Williams, Plakoyiannaki, and Krasniqi 2023). Our methodological approach integrates bottom-up *and* top-down perspectives in an intersubjective process. This unveils nuanced insights into uncertain and complex phenomena (Yin 2018) helping to better comprehend the influence of the local context and underlying mechanisms between hometown and entrepreneurship (Habersetzer et al. 2021). Following demands for increased rigour in qualitative research, we take guidance from the recent work of Van Burg et al. (2022) embracing methodological plurality by combining primary and secondary data to inductively build theory. This approach recognizes how unfolding events are shaped by temporal, spatial, and historical contexts, enabling a better understanding of the lived experiences of everyday entrepreneurs and how their interactions play out in place (McKeever, Jack, and Anderson 2015).

We echo Welter, Baker, and Wirsching (2019) who challenge the common view of entrepreneurial contexts as stable, fruitful, and taken for granted. We chose to study Norwich, the county town of Norfolk considered to be the capital of East Anglia, UK. Dubbed as one of the 'Best Places to Live' in the UK by *The Times* (2023) it has been ranked one of the most prosperous shopping destinations in the UK with a mix of chain retailers and independent stores as well as one of the largest permanent undercover markets in Europe. Part of central Norwich, known as *The Lanes*, offers a series of small alleyways and streets noted for its abundance of independent retailers allowing the city to maintain its character and individuality. This provides a specified environment tailor-made for retail-facing

entrepreneurs to establish and develop where chain retailers are refused. Nevertheless, Norwich's insular geographic location meant that until 2014 it was the largest UK city not linked to the dual carriageway and motorway network. Given social networks in peripheral places are often denser and more closed (Habersetzer et al. 2021) the case study provides a socially compelling, diverse, seemingly thriving, independent business environment. The insular and peripheral nature of this context provides an ideal setting to explore how everyday entrepreneurs navigate the underlying forces between hometown and entrepreneurship, facilitating focused observation of actor interactions and coexistence.

3.2. Data collection

Purposive sampling was utilized to gain access to everyday entrepreneurs using Norwich City Council's dataset for local business rates. Our approach extends understanding of hometown by moving beyond ontological individualism to explore entrepreneurial storytelling on relational, embodied, mediated, and organized aspects of hometown practices. We heed Van Burg et al.'s (2022) recommendation using in-depth interviews, observations, and archival data, analysed with discourse analysis and grounded theory, to capture everyday heterogeneity and offer substantive theoretical insights into entrepreneurship.

Our sample consisted of 21 independent (i.e. privately-owned firms) everyday entrepreneurs who underwent in-depth interviews at their company premises eliciting natural, flowing conversations (averaging 65 minutes) with the data collection period ranging from 2018–2022. We accommodated diversity in our sample (e.g. sectors of economic activity (see Table 1); migratory status; age; gender) acknowledging that (non)migration processes are rooted in multi-layered everyday lives, are ongoing, and may be instigated by multiple reasons (Haartsen and Stockdale 2018). A life story method was employed, allowing interviewees to engage in storytelling about their lived experiences and introduce their own interpretations of home, hometown, and mobility, particularly in relation to enterprise, aligning with our inductive approach and therefore mitigating interviewer bias (Stam 2007). This supported our investigation uncovering how entrepreneurs gain legitimacy by leveraging a sociology of place (Dacin et al. 2024), linking past experiences and accumulated resources to a projected future, whilst understanding present decision-making (Kimmitt et al. 2024). Further details about the pseudonymised interviewees, their origins, and ventures can be seen in Table 2. All respondents were white British bar two (Karol from Germany and William from Australia), replicating the 77.6% white British and 8.7% white other ethnic profile of Norwich (ONS 2021).

The recorded and transcribed primary material was explicated using a multi-source evidence critical incident technique (Redhead and Bika 2022; Stam 2007) responding to calls for plurality in contextualized entrepreneurship research (Dacin et al. 2024; Kimmitt et al. 2024; Van Burg et al. 2022). Four critical incidents (*local nepotism; The Lanes; local infrastructure; impact of chains and multinationals*) were purposefully chosen based upon their impact and prevalence within multiple entrepreneurs' accounts complementing and triangulating primary interview material. Secondary

Table 1. Sample stratification with the study area's business sectors.

Business sector	Number of privately-owned independent businesses in the study area	% of total in the study area	% and number of entrepreneurs interviewed
Retail	1,522	38%	42% (9)
Professional Services	657	17%	14% (3)
Construction/Manufacturing	565	14%	14% (3)
Leisure/Hospitality	484	12%	10% (2)
Transport/Travel	227	6%	5% (1)
Health/Care	89	2%	5% (1)
Other Services	443	11%	10% (2)
TOTAL	3,987	100%	100% (21)

Table 2. Profiles of the entrepreneurs.

Entrepreneur – Pseudonym	Entrepreneur – Age	Entrepreneur – Occupation	Firm – Employees	Firm – Sector	Entrepreneur – Migratory status	Entrepreneur – Where from originally?
Isabel	46	Retailer	8	Retail	Return migrant	N/A
Karl	51	Florist	30	Retail	Local	N/A
Mary	64	Retailer	7	Retail	In-migrant	Nottinghamshire
Jessica	51	Retailer	10	Retail	Local	N/A
Harry	40	Retailer	8	Retail	Local	N/A
David	36	Retailer	6	Retail	Local	N/A
Kelly	56	Baker	13	Retail	Local	N/A
Alex	42	Manufacturing retailer	450	Retail	In-migrant	London
Rhys	62	Bespoke supplier	10	Retail	Out-migrant	Oxfordshire
Isaac	58	Graphic designer	8	Professional Services	In-migrant	London*
Megan	49	Professional recruiter	2	Professional Services	Return migrant	Surrey
Kyle	48	Software developer	90	Professional Services	Return migrant	N/A
Cameron	58	Property developer	12	Construction/Manufacturing	Return migrant	N/A
Joel	61	Manufacturer	4	Construction/Manufacturing	Return migrant	N/A
Charlie	46	Engineer & manufacturer	21	Construction/Manufacturing	In-migrant	Essex
Ivan	47	Restaurateur	12	Leisure/Hospitality	Return migrant	N/A
Karol	33	Restaurateur	15	Leisure/Hospitality	Return migrant	Norfolk**
Arnold	41	Transport provider	24	Transport/Travel	Immigrant	Germany
James	56	Childcare provider	46	Health/Care	Return migrant	N/A
Scott	38	Estate agent	4	Other Services	Local	N/A
William	54	Café owner & servicer	10	Other Services	Return migrant	N/A
					Immigrant	Australia

*Moved from Norwich to Cambridge, UK but still has social ties and business processes linking to Norwich.

**Moved from Great Yarmouth to Norwich.

source quotes from local newspapers (*Norwich Evening News*; *Eastern Daily Press*), reports, archival material, and other online sources were included which were pertinent to the storytelling of our participants, and which reflected the ‘collective’ voice of the context from 2013–2023. This sheds light on how such incidents influenced entrepreneurial agency and vice versa, as well as how they were perceived by local and national media. This summarizes the social constructionist perspective of Norwich, illustrating how entrepreneurial storytelling is dynamically intertwined to the city’s historical, cultural, and power dynamics and the agentic processes of place-making (Dacin et al. 2024; Lewicka 2011).

While qualitative research and a singular case study approach provide deep insights into specific phenomena, they do however have inherent limitations. What we may lack in generalizability we make up for offering a contextualized explanation (Welch et al. 2011). The small sample size is mitigated by employing multimodal research, illuminating how diverse forms of entrepreneurial agency ‘deploy culture’ (Gehman and Soublière 2017) in peripheral non-core contexts frequently overlooked (Rodríguez-Pose, Terrero-Dávila, and Lee 2023) where inequalities are on the rise (Brown and Cowling 2021; Pike et al. 2024). This approach also advances research aiming to capture the symbolic meanings of places (Dacin et al. 2024) recognizing individuals’ critical capacity to construct meanings within their social environments.

3.3. Data analysis

Given the infancy of studies on place in entrepreneurial narratives (Kimmitt et al. 2024; Welter and Baker 2021), we adopted an inductive grounded theory design, allowing the data to guide us to key themes (Van Burg et al. 2022). Moreover, discourse analysis clarifies the contestation and convergence of voices, essential for understanding hometown entrepreneurship’s contextual connections and impact (Van Burg et al. 2022). Our process of analysis started with the open coding of the entrepreneurs’ narratives using line-by-line analysis, generating conceptual ideas from the chunks of data alongside a systematic and iterative constant comparison with the literature (Strauss and Corbin 1998). Ensuring reflexivity that our own understanding of home acknowledges its different meanings, our open coding captured all instances of entrepreneurs’ storytelling about Norwich as a hometown.

These first-order categories ranged from home advantage, favouritism, insiders versus outsiders, seeking opportunities, socialization, and neighbourliness amongst others. Our analysis also enabled us to identify how interviewees recounted critical incidents and milestones of their entrepreneurial journey within a hometown which we further explored in the second phase of the data analysis. This approach, emerging from recent entrepreneurial research (cf. Redhead and Bika 2022; Stam 2007; Williams, Plakoyiannaki, and Krasniqi 2023) allowed the analysis to examine and situate findings within the co-constructed but also more macro generated meanings of place over time. We built our first-order categories into second-order themes consisting of ‘developing social capital’, ‘local network integration’, ‘place attachment’ alongside that of ‘place detachment’, ‘territorial reintegration’, and ‘rekindling social capital’. Our iterative and integrative analysis subsequently enabled two aggregate theoretical dimensions to emerge. First, the ‘degrees of localness’ theme within narratives showed that local entrepreneurs had an edge over non-locals exhibiting a preference for perceived ‘localness’, facilitating access to networks and resources. Second, the ‘boomerang effect’ dimension in their storytelling described how individuals lost affinity for their hometown, left to experientially enhance their lives, then returned with re-evaluated priorities. These findings, which work in combination, led us to develop the concepts of ‘degrees of localness’ and the ‘boomerang effect’ as important theoretical advancements in hometown entrepreneurship. Our data structure (Figure 1) visually depicts these processes of analysis.

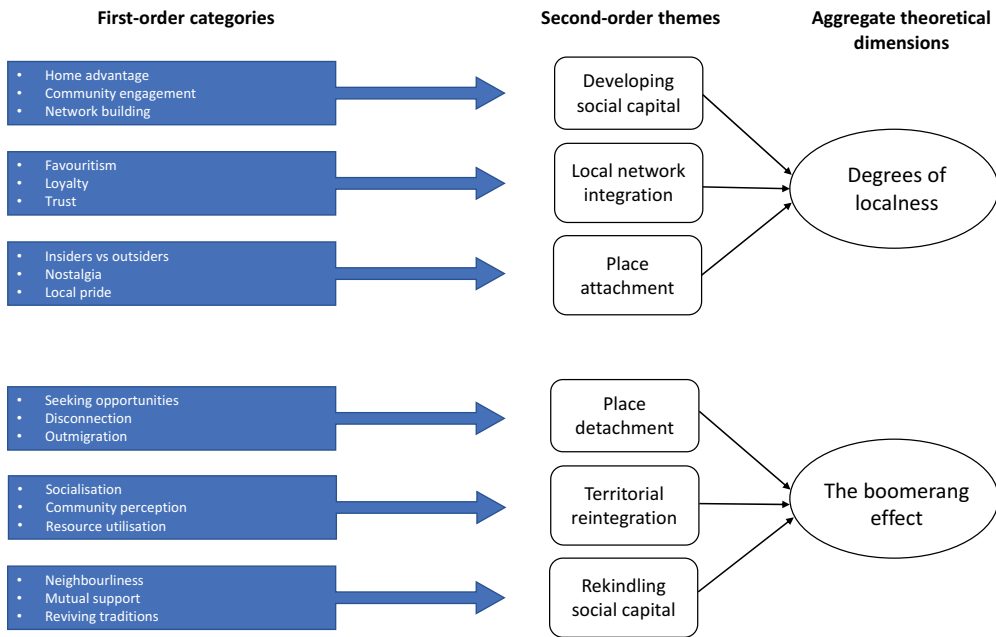


Figure 1. Data structure.

4. Findings

Having set out to explore *how the concept of ‘hometown’ is recounted in entrepreneurial storytelling*, this section is separated into our two aggregate theoretical dimensions answering the research question as viewed through our six second-order themes (in *italics*). Tables 3-6 concluding each subsection provide additional primary and secondary evidence supporting our arguments, with the latter viewed through our aforementioned critical incidents.

4.1. How local is ‘local’?

Hometown seemed to matter to entrepreneurs for decreeing localness. If an individual and their generations before them resided within the city for the entirety of their lives, the more local they were considered in our interviewees’ accounts offering a home advantage for them to *develop social capital* becoming ‘accepted’ within both business and social circles:

[Clients] like to keep things local as much as possible ... people can be quite strange here in that they can take a while to accept anybody ... you have to live here for 100 years before people accept you. (Megan, 49, return migrant, recruiter, 2e¹)

Megan, a Norwich native in a client-facing profession, explains here how individuals are not considered a ‘true’ local unless they had been historically present within her hometown for generations. This emphasis on generational familiarity surrounding community engagement affirms the importance of being known within a hometown to influence opportunity recognition; leveraging established reputations that align with local demands and the community’s historical purchasing patterns can ensure sufficient clientele:

[Staying here was] the best thing for us, Norwich being Norwich, a lot of it is word of mouth ... it’s not about what you know, it’s who you know. (Karl, 51, local, florist, 30e)

Table 3. Degrees of localness – additional entrepreneurs’ evidential quotes.

Second-order themes	Additional evidence of degrees of localness
Developing social capital	<p>‘I’ve only been up here for 35 years so I’m still a newcomer to a lot of people up here. People here are set in their ways; you get a few plonkers but you get over it. . .I do feel quite secluded. . .I know I’m a visitor still and I don’t want it to sound like that’s a negative thing, that’s just the way it is’ (Joel, 61, in-migrant, manufacturer, 4e).</p> <p>‘We are, clearly, new, it’s very obvious to me [from speaking to others] that until we’ve done three generations of being here, we’re not going to be considered “local people”’ (Alex, 42, in-migrant, manufacturing retailer, 450e).</p>
Local network integration	<p>‘[Norwich] is very insular though, people only deal with people they’ve known for decades, people their family knew. I think that’s partly why Norwich has succeeded and survived, they have that mentality of “no, we’re not changing”. . .they have a reputation that they wouldn’t deal with anybody from outside’ (Rhys, 62, out-migrant, bespoke supplier, 10e).</p> <p>‘If I wasn’t from here, I wouldn’t have chosen to set up a business here. . .Being from here, having lots of contacts, and having the vision that I wanted to do something different, I saw the potential. I know there are little pockets in and around Norwich which have very affluent people. They’re the ones that I wanted to draw out’ (Jessica, 51, local, retailer, 10e).</p>
Place attachment	<p>‘I wouldn’t ever leave. . . It’s all I know. . .I’m keen to retain as much of our East Anglian based business as much as possible’ (Karl, 51, local, florist, 30e).</p> <p>‘I’ve been here my entire life. . .I love it. . .it would be a wrench to move the business anywhere else. It’s a very nice place to live but it’s [being inside] the networks that make it [ideal for me], it’s the friend and family network really’ (David, 36, local, retailer, 6e).</p>

Both Megan and Karl’s storytelling reveals how their clients, other locally ‘born and bred’ individuals, demonstrate a similar preference towards those of a comparable localness underscoring the importance of developing social capital within local B2B (business-to-business) and B2C (business-to-consumer) network building. This also positions temporality (i.e. historical length of residence) as essential when deciding degrees of localness:

You have to have two generations in the graveyard to be local, that’s the saying . . . It hasn’t been easy for us here . . . if you are new, people are cautious. (Karol, 33, immigrant, restaurateur, 15e)

Karol, a German restaurateur, recounts that in smaller, non-core contexts, entrepreneurs often rely heavily on established reputations and long-term relationships reinforcing the concept of trust building in entrepreneurial activities. This generational familiarity is seen as enhancing brand loyalty and customer retention as locals are more likely to support businesses with deep-rooted connections in the community. Such dynamics support the perception that the longer one (and their previous generations) spends in a hometown, the more likely they are to foster localized multi-layered embedded relationships which mobilize bounded resources, develop a local clientele base, and therefore increase chances of success through an emphasis on hometown proximity. The secondary sources’ critical incident of the impact of chains and multi-nationals further reinforce the perception that chances to develop local social capital are hallowed across the city as:

Chain stores are kept out [of certain areas] and [independent] shops are never empty. (01/02/19 *Eastern Daily Press*, Caroline Culot, Journalist²)

This was found to impact upon entrepreneurship processes demonstrated through their *local network integration*:

It was started by my great grandfather in 1941 and the two main areas we specialised in were the two main industries in Norwich at the time . . . [people] still trade on who they know, on face-to-face or over the phone contact . . . [it] isn’t the cheapest, I suspect price of items is probably an issue but in terms of reliability of delivery and service and quality of product – it’s those things which are important. (Charlie, 46, return migrant, engineer and manufacturer, 21e)

Charlie, a locally born engineer, recounts how these loyal hometown connections with key local figures foster reliability and trustworthiness, leading to the assurance of a superior product or service

Table 4. Degrees of localness – additional secondary source evidence.

Second-order themes	Critical incidents			
	Local nepotism	The Lanes	Infrastructure	Impact of chains and multinationals
Developing social capital	'[Local man] Jonty Young is the gatekeeper of the Norwich Lanes, working with landlords to ensure chain stores are kept out and shops are never empty. There is a waiting list of 30 retailers wanting to move in to the Lanes' (01/02/19 <i>Eastern Daily Press</i> , Caroline Culot, Journalist).	'[A] founder of a mobile payment app was piloted in the Norwich Lanes. . . [and launched a] reward programme for independent traders in Norwich' (15/06/16 <i>Eastern Daily Press</i> , Mark Shields, Journalist).	'[Until 2014] Norwich was the largest UK city not linked to the dual carriageway and motorway network – something which campaigners have long claimed has held it back from realising its full potential' (12/12/14 <i>Eastern Daily Press</i> , Dan Grimmer, Journalist).	'This is the heart and soul of Norwich: Shopping local safely will save city's indies' (07/12/20 <i>Eastern Daily Press</i> , Eleanor Pringle, Journalist).
Local network integration	'Norfolk is a fine county. . . the people who live in Norfolk could not be of a more contrasting manner. Cold, suspicious, unfriendly and unwelcoming. It is said even if you have been living in Norfolk for over 20 years, you are still a stranger. . . Maybe it is a fine county with insular unfriendly locals' (14/08/17 <i>Eastern Daily Press</i> , DJ Zenden, Contributor).	'The Norwich Lanes is arguably the largest city centre community of independent only businesses to be found anywhere in the UK and it's imperative for the local economy, that they stay that way' (19/01/22 <i>Norwich Evening News</i> , Owen Sennitt, Journalist).	'I like to travel from my local airport rather than having to trek to London and back, even if I have to pay the £10 development fee. Norwich is not the cheapest place to fly from but it is most convenient for me' (10/07/17 <i>Norwich Evening News</i> , Jenny Holmwood, Contributor).	'Local retail experts have expressed confidence in Norwich, saying it is still a favoured location among national chains and supports a growing array of independents. . . [this] is helping to support Norwich's retail scene. . . [and] Norwich has become a destination shopping city' (19/09/18 <i>Eastern Daily Press</i> , Bethany Whymark, Journalist).
Place attachment	'The BID and city council have also been working closely with the likes of John Lewis, Jarrolds, The Forum, Norwich Castle and the city's two shopping malls. . . for the wider good of the city' (30/10/13 <i>Norwich Evening News</i> , David Freezer, Journalist).	'The city's large number of independent, smaller venues [are] now part of its charm. . . it makes Norwich a destination' (13/02/19 <i>Norwich Evening News</i> , Sabrina Johnson, Journalist).	'Proposals to give [housing] developers in Norwich a way round paying a levy of thousands of pounds have created conflict between three of the county's councils' (15/11/18 <i>Eastern Daily Press</i> , David Hannant, Local Democracy Reporter).	'If you let one corporation in to the Lanes, the brands and chains may well follow' (19/06/21 <i>Eastern Daily Press</i> , Norwich Lanes Association Spokesman).

in both B2B and B2C contexts. This local familiarity holds immense significance within the city. The inherent 'insular' quality of the place, as pointed out by Scott (38, return migrant, estate agent, 4e), has solidified its inclination to maintain the status quo. This preference for a 'traditional approach' favouring local business owners remains a source of comfort and decreased competition, reinforcing the sense that being well-known within the community is vital:

Our business is lucky that Norwich is a very traditional area and people still trade in a very traditional manner . . . we possibly have a way of working that isn't as used to change as other parts of the UK but, similarly, some of those things are actually very nice because they make Norwich a nicer place to work and do business . . . there's less competition in this part of the world. (Charlie, 46, return migrant, engineer and manufacturer, 21e)

This reflects the importance of relational embeddedness and loyalty in such entrepreneurial storytelling where local network integration is seen to provide robust support systems, access to resources, and valuable referrals facilitating business operations and growth. Whilst Charlie and his

fellow locals may feel such culturally embedded actions are a nice, traditional way to mobilize resources more efficiently, it can also raise inherent complications and aversions towards outsiders or newcomers to the hometown context:

When we first started, I would make a lot of phone calls to suppliers and if they were a small local supplier, because I've obviously got the accent, it was almost like "oh, who are you? Where are you ringing from?" so I had to say "I know I don't sound like [it] but actually I do have an independent business here". (Karol, 33, immigrant, restaurateur, 15e)

This underscores the importance of identity negotiation as entrepreneurs feel the need to constantly assert their local ties to gain acceptance, illustrating the challenges of social capital formation for outsiders. Within our secondary source analysis, the critical incident of local nepotism also reflected such attitudes:

Locals keep telling me to stop promoting our county to outsiders, but I like to share, and I feel everyone should experience the joys of living in this amazing county. (21/07/15 *Metro*, Jess Shanahan, Journalist)

Indeed, those family businesses who have been historically present within the hometown context over generations face evidently fewer complications, even in the face of controversy:

[X family business'] plans to build more than 200 homes in Norwich city centre which will see a much-loved printing museum forced to relocate, have been recommended for approval. (09/03/19 *Eastern Daily Press*, David Hannant, Local Democracy Reporter)

Their status as a 'true' local business position them as 'council favourites' and valued consultants, frequently sought for their opinions and often influential in shaping future plans within the city.

Such dynamics were found to variously influence how entrepreneurs approach *place attachment* within the hometown context:

I am a Brexit[er], always have been ... big companies can go anywhere in the world and sell or produce their goods ... I don't want them coming here and invading my territory, my sales pitch [just] because they have the means to do so. (Jessica, 51, local, retailer, 10e)

Jessica, an interior design retailer, reflects a strong sense of territoriality with fixed boundaries determining insiders versus outsiders. Her deep attachment and protectiveness towards her hometown and customers signify a profound emotional and personal investment in the location, its resources, and associated activities. This psychological ownership and desire to maintain control and exclusivity within her defined 'territory' can enhance commitment and motivation but may also lead to resistance to external influences and innovation. Our findings also revealed that despite many entrepreneurs spending a significant portion of their lives in the city, talking about it as their hometown, individuals with a stronger historical presence often regard their own attachment as more significant:

The line that my father always uses is "if we haven't got a motorway, it keeps out all of the pricks" [laughs] which is a theory I kind of agree with. We are insular, but, it's a hard thing to say really. (Scott, 38, return migrant, estate agent, 4e)

Scott unveils that distinguishing the varying degrees of localness of those within Norwich is an ideology passed down and instilled from generation to generation. This entrepreneurial storytelling impacts networking behaviours and resource acquisition, substantiating divides between insiders and outsiders, limiting opportunities for newcomers, and reinforcing a hierarchical structure within the local entrepreneurial environment. The imaginary of progressing through the degrees of localness signifies how social capital is seen as unevenly distributed based on place attachment and historical presence, affecting opportunity recognition and business growth within the community:

We were very naïve, we didn't know, we just loved the shop ... Norwich is a bit behind the times ... coming from outside, it's very cliquish so it can be difficult at times. You have to be in that clique to fit in, and if you're not in

that clique, you're an outsider ... it's like being left alone in the middle of the ocean ... with hindsight now, I wouldn't do it again ... it's very hard work for no reward. (Mary, 64, in-migrant, retailer, 7e)

Here, Mary, who has lived in the city for 34 years, recounts her disadvantage of not being 'local' enough, reflecting a sense of loneliness and social exclusion within a hometown. Despite her long-term residence, Mary's personal mobility and outsider status represent a hindrance for her integration into local norms, resources, and networks. In this viewpoint, entrepreneurial place attachment is not just about physical location but also about being integrated into nostalgic social networks, where time is crucial for legitimizing non-local entrepreneurs in the eyes of their local counterparts. This exclusionary dynamic, rooted in local pride, outlines that social acceptance and integration into local cliques are essential for entrepreneurial success in peripheral urban hometowns, serving as a defensive strategy for locals to sustain their business, competitive advantage, and survival. Nevertheless, such territoriality has not gone unnoticed and remedial suggestions have been put forward to make the city more accessible whilst still retaining its traditional, community feel:

Perhaps more involvement in community projects would aid [community development], and also ease any perceived division between [non-locals] and locals. (13/08/17 *The Norwich Radical*, James Anthony, Contributor)

Here, the secondary source's collective voice emphasizes the importance of community involvement and collective action in mitigating the exclusionary dynamics underpinning entrepreneurial storytelling within a hometown:

A charity café has reopened as a community hub ... we know loneliness and social isolation have significant implications. It is important to combat that and create a space where people can support each other. (26/05/22 *Norwich Evening News*, Sophie Wyllie, Senior Reporter)

The collective voice reinforces the idea of continued connectivity and relationship building, capturing that hometown contexts are neither static nor bounded and can reproduce social divides. Such initiatives are imperative for fostering networking, collaboration, and entrepreneurial growth, while addressing (in part) gatekeeping that impedes access to local information flows, resources, and networks.

4.2. Absence makes the heart grow fonder

A number of local entrepreneurs recounted how they have previously exhibited *place detachment* from their hometown out-migrating to pursue education, careers, and life experiences elsewhere:

I left Norwich because I wanted more, I wanted to work on different things ... there wasn't enough going on in Norwich to keep me local ... I felt like I had so much potential to grow. (Kyle, 48, return migrant, software developer, 90e)

Many of our sample felt similarly to Kyle, detailing how:

Until you leave you don't appreciate the good stuff at home ... I grew up [here] ... post 2008, the credit crunch, there were few graduate jobs available and I wanted to get away; so I ended up doing ... a PhD [after a degree] and went to work for [an aerospace company at a UK city] ... [post] September 11th [this company] was looking to make voluntary redundancies ... it felt like a good time to move back to Norwich and take over the family firm. (Charlie, 46, return migrant, engineer and manufacturer, 21e)

This entrepreneurial storytelling about place detachment/reattachment suggests that distance and exposure to different environments has led individuals to recognize the unique advantages and resources inherent in their hometown, facilitating a form of opportunity recognition. Such discontent with the regional status quo was also displayed through the secondary sources and the critical incident of infrastructure:

[Norwich] needs high quality rail infrastructure to support growth. (20/05/19 *BBC News*, Chris Starkie, New Anglia LEP Chief Executive)

With further limitations to growth also recounted through the impact of chains and multinationals critical incident on diminishing employment opportunities:

More than 73% of the young people that responded [to a survey regarding mobility intentions] were born in Norfolk and 65.1% have already moved away . . . the job opportunities for young people are fairly limited: it is often easier to travel elsewhere to give your career an early boost (31/07/21 *Norwich Evening News*, Sophie Skyring, Community Reporter)

This finding captures that losing an affinity towards one's hometown allowed our entrepreneurs to disconnect from the spatial context, relinquishing their ties, and temporarily detaching themselves. Their entrepreneurial storytelling shows that once they felt they had accumulated the necessary experience(s) they wanted to achieve following such individual mobility, they would engage in *territorial reintegration*, coming home to delve back into how it was in their mind's eye. Scott, who exhibited this yearning to return home most prominently, helped to coin the term 'boomerang effect':

'Norwich is my hometown, I've travelled all about and came back, it's like a boomerang really, I suppose. It is [the same] for most people I know. It's just my hometown . . . I wanted to come back [and] this sounds a bit egotistical but there was a gap in the market and we filled it'. (Scott, 38, return migrant, estate agent, 4e)

The small size of the city may mean some feel they are restricted when it comes to opportunities for education, career development, and personal growth. However, it seems that the entrepreneurs greatly value their social connections, memories, and historical ties, translating these emotional and long-established connections into entrepreneurial opportunities. Many in our sample fondly recalled their past attachment which underpinned their knowledge transfer and innovation back home:

'Wherever you go you just find yourself gravitating back home . . . after 25 years [away working] we knew that there was a gap for a local independent provider knowing how Norwich is y'know. I'm Norwich born and bred and I thought with my experience, background, and know-how it just made sense'. (Megan, 49, return migrant, recruiter, 2e)

It is important to note not all our sample recounted their hometown this way and how when reassessing the past one should not succumb to nostalgia:

'There's the opportunity to start a new business in Norwich because the place is thriving . . . [however, I] could never go back and I swore I would never go back because I always think that things are never as good as they seem'. (Rhys, 62, out-migrant, bespoke supplier, 10e)

Rhys's account suggests that opportunity recognition alone is insufficient to drive return migration if personal or emotional barriers persist. This adds a layer of understanding to the dynamics of return migration, indicating that while some entrepreneurs find motivation in their historical and social connections, others may be deterred by the disparities between past memories and present realities. Analysing such lived experiences in line with the secondary sources' local nepotism critical incident offers explanation behind an entrepreneurial return to a peripheral city in East Anglia – the social ties and opportunities for socialization are rich and are valued highly by residents and visitors alike:

'The thing we hear the most from people is: "I had no idea Norwich was like this – it's such a well-kept secret"'. (08/02/19 *Eastern Daily Press*, Eleanor Pringle, Journalist)

This encapsulates the thoughts and feelings behind what hometown means experientially to returnees through entrepreneurial storytelling that moves beyond the instrumentally rigid leave-learn-return notion:

'I moved back because . . . there's less people, there's more countryside. It's got the right combination, Norwich is quite a small city really, so you get what you need from the city when you need it . . . it's my home, it's my family home . . . I could work from anywhere, but I wouldn't consider moving anywhere else'. (Kyle, 48, return migrant, software developer, 90e)

Even in an industry where local social capital and being known in the locality are less important, Kyle talks about how he appreciates his hometown balance in being a small city that offers necessary

Table 5. Boomerang effect – additional entrepreneurs’ evidential quotes.

Second-order themes	Additional evidence of the boomerang effect
Place detachment	<p>‘[Norwich] has got a lot to offer, more from a social point of view still at the moment than a business point of view, I think people still feel the need to travel away from Norwich...lots of people over the years have said Norwich is the arse end of nowhere. . .a lot of people come back, in our experience, I know quite a lot of. . .[people] who feel “Oh I want to go and try somewhere else”. You go and try somewhere else and it’s not many years before you think “Actually, I’d rather be back in Norwich”’ (Isaac, 58, in-migrant, graphic designer, 8e).</p> <p>‘We were originally based in Bristol, I absconded there, but deep down I’m a Norwich person, I always have been, it’s my home. . .because you can live and work here so easily, you can pretty much do whatever you want’ (Arnold, 41, return migrant, transport provider, 24e).</p>
Territorial reintegration	<p>‘It’s my home. I was obviously born here, I was raised here, all of my family are here. My nan and grandad were born and raised here, they’re buried here. There were times I thought I didn’t want to come back but then I thought no, this is my home. . .what little I do have, I want to make the most out of it’ (Charlie, 46, return migrant, engineer and manufacturer, 21e).</p> <p>‘We had a link from family where we were offered to do a small boutique hotel so that was a big draw back to the Norwich area and I’ve always liked Norwich. I realized, “Actually, it’s time we changed”. So we came back with trying to do that. . .we met with [our family connection and the client hotel]. . .and that was fortunately a fantastic success’ (Cameron, 58, return migrant, property developer, 12e).</p>
Rekindling social capital	<p>‘Obviously we have better [established] links with people who are in this part of the world because we are from here and we know people better. Being in another part of the UK where we hadn’t had any previous experience was quite tricky to get the advice that we need and rely on. It can be very one-sided [and difficult to trust]. . .people tell you what you want to hear’ (Cameron, 58, return migrant, property developer, 12e).</p> <p>‘Being here, growing up here, feeling lucky to be here. It’s amazing – you can see how many of my friends have left school or university, gone around the world and they’ve all ended up back here. . . [when] I came back home, [I] walked down The Lanes with a couple of mates and I thought “I’m not going anywhere”. . .I just felt comfortable again. . .no matter what work I need doing, I know someone for the job’ (Scott, 38, return migrant, estate agent, 4e).</p>

Table 6. Boomerang effect – additional secondary source evidence.

Second-order themes	Critical incidents			Impact of chains and multinationals
	Local nepotism	The Lanes	Infrastructure	
Place detachment	<p>‘Why I love Norfolk. . .It has to be Norwich – this is not just our favourite city in the county of Norfolk, I think it’s close to being our favourite city in the whole country! . . .although as we are now moving [away] in the spring we’ll have to make a special trip to [return]’ (20/11/21 <i>Eastern Daily Press</i>, Jane Hedges, Dean of Norwich).</p>	<p>‘The Connecting the Norwich Lanes project. . .included the controversial closure of Exchange Street. . . [and] has triggered anger, from activists. . . to taxi drivers and businesses unhappy at the closure’ (30/07/23 <i>Eastern Daily Press</i>, Dan Grimmer, Specialist Reporter).</p>	<p>‘For too long we had to accept a poor service. Old trains running on creaking infrastructure which was proving a real barrier to business growth’ (20/05/19 <i>Eastern Daily Press</i>, Chris Starkie, New Anglia LEP Chief Executive).</p>	<p>‘A number of high street brands are closing stores. . .including Boots, Argos and Iceland’ (07/08/23 <i>Eastern Daily Press</i>, Kate Wolstenholme, Live Reporter).</p>
Territorial reintegration	<p>‘I like everything about Norwich. It’s friendly and it is easy to live here. . .I was born and raised in Norwich, went away for about nine years and then came back. . .It’s what everybody does!’ (31/03/18 <i>Eastern Daily Press</i>, Dan Grimmer, Specialist Reporter).</p>	<p>‘It’s totally understandable that some people are still very wary about coming [back] into the city [following Covid]. . .footfall may be down on previous years but the Lanes have a very loyal customer base’ (06/08/21 <i>Eastern Daily Press</i>, Eleanor Pringle, Business Correspondent).</p>	<p>‘Although there has definitely been progress within recent years, transport to the likes of London for days out etc are still very slow and expensive, whereas other areas have big cities close. . .I’d like to move back to Norfolk further down the line. . . however I know I would miss access to travel’ (31/07/21 <i>Norwich Evening News</i>, Nicole Watts, Easyjet Trading Manager).</p>	<p>‘Many students who come to the University of East Anglia and Norwich University of the Arts end up staying in the city, while other people who had left had been drawn back saying there was “nowhere like it” [however]. . . we’ve lost quite a few big employers and if we were to lose more it would have an effect’ (31/03/18 <i>Eastern Daily Press</i>, Dan Grimmer, Specialist Reporter).</p>

(Continued)

Table 6. (Continued).

Second-order themes	Critical incidents			
	Local nepotism	The Lanes	Infrastructure	Impact of chains and multinationals
Rekindling social capital	'Luckily for us, even though we're not a chain, we have a network with other local independent businesses who appreciate how tough it is and will give us the best price they can' (02/01/19 <i>Eastern Daily Press</i> , Francis Woolf, Local Restaurateur)	'Consumers are moving away from chains. Instead they are choosing to shop and eat at smaller independents which offer something a bit more authentic' (03/09/19 <i>Eastern Daily Press</i> , Stefan Gurney, Norwich BID Executive Director).	'We are determined to improve Norfolk's infrastructure after years of under-investment' (02/06/15 <i>ITV News</i> , George Nobbs, Norfolk County Council Leader).	'The big chains have been safely corralled into a couple of malls, leaving the streets free for a wonderfully quirky open-air market and a fine selection of independents' (29/01/17 <i>The Times</i> , Tim Palmer, Journalist).

amenities when required. His decision to return is not solely practical; it is rooted in a rediscovered sense of belonging and attachment driven by familial ties. Scott similarly recounts the multifaceted factors that play a role in return migration decisions:

'I was account manager for [various local businesses] ... when you're younger you always just want to get out; your hometown is shite; you're just fed up of it; the people ... [I] had a midlife crisis, divorced my wife; drove trucks [the world over]; basically just partying and DJ'ing then I thought I'd better come back and do something sensible; I knew somebody who worked at [a lettings agency] ... they needed a hand; I thought "I can do a better job" and that's why we are here today ... everybody helps each other out; you share services with people you know; all of our [contractors] are local; it's good because ... we're putting money back into the economy ... I feel comfortable and safe now'. (Scott, 38, return migrant, estate agent, 4e)

Kyle and Scott's storytelling illustrates how time away made them appreciate their hometown and how reattaching themselves may *rekindle social capital*, crucial to their identity and overall wellbeing. As returning locals, their more flexible territorial boundaries enable them to seamlessly reintegrate into the hierarchical structure, leveraging existing connections, and providing a competitive advantage. This suggests mobile individuals can still benefit from enduring local ties:

'It's nice us being insular because you have a quality of life in Norwich that you'd struggle to get in some other parts of the UK ... it's cheaper here, we know people here ... We're 4th generation; an established business with our niche of selling a few products to an established customer base that's suited us quite well and we've had less competition ... There's no one else like us locally ... I make the most of the people I know here, I've got contacts with computer service providers, web developers, solicitors, accountants, we have informal links with them'. (Charlie, 46, return migrant, engineer and manufacturer, 21e)

Reassessing one's temporal attachment to hometown often brought back positive memories encouraging entrepreneurs to return like a boomerang with new ideas from academic, career, or life experience. This process aids entrepreneurship by emphasizing continuity, safety, and comfort, thereby reducing risk. The distinct social capital in the city makes it more logical to tap into individuals' degree of localness rather than establishing themselves elsewhere:

'I studied Fashion Management in London and worked in London for a few companies so I got a grip on how it all worked really and then came back home to Norwich for a summer just to review what I was going to do but I had my parents' help here so I decided to dive in at the deep end and I never left'. (Isabel, 46, return migrant, retailer, 8e)

Such interpretations of the past offer explanation as to why entrepreneurs pursue a return to hometown to experience the present – they value long-standing connections, rekindling social ties, opportunities for socialization, and mutual support over opportunities to increase their ventures' chances for economic success elsewhere. The rich socialization running throughout the city was triangulated in the secondary sources through the critical incident of The Lanes:

'We have created a village in a city, where you can find great customer service, people don't just stand behind counters like they do in the national stores but are willing to help ... [it] has its own microeconomy'. (01/02/19 *Eastern Daily Press*, Jonty Young, Norwich Lanes Association)

The notion of a village within a city emphasizes the importance of socialization within the case study. It highlights strong local social ties fortified over generations which are piggybacked on and further strengthened through returnee entrepreneurship, thus enhancing neighbourliness, reviving traditions, and making it feel more like home. The collective voice mirrors the return migrant entrepreneurs' perspectives, portraying a microeconomy where everyone knows each other, forming a social capital foundation that 'keeps the money *here*' (Scott, 38, return migrant, estate agent, 4e).

5. Discussion

We enhance understanding by examining how everyday entrepreneurs leverage, construct, and reconstruct hometown to aid legitimation, showcasing nuanced ways in which cultural resources are deployed for stakeholder support through storytelling (Korsgaard, Müller, and Welter 2021; Lounsbury, Gehman, and Glynn 2019; Welter and Baker 2021). This approach shifts away from previous instrumentally-focused views of home often found in entrepreneurship literature, emphasizing socialization, cultural conformity, and networking. The below subheadings cover our threefold contribution: 1) revealing the exclusionary implications of 'local versus non-local' entrepreneurial storytelling; 2) redefining returnee entrepreneurship as a complex socio-cultural reconnection; and, 3) enhancing understanding of peripheral urban regional development through a detailed view of diverse actor coexistence.

5.1. Degrees of localness

Firstly, our degrees of localness theoretical advancement contributes to entrepreneurship literature by underscoring how the continuum between local and non-local (now viewed as non-binary) can have notable implications for entrepreneurial processes within a hometown context. If individuals and their previous generations resided within the area, they were considered more attached and loyal to place as they held a better knowledge of the context's history, its norms, and local preferences (Cuervo-Cazurra, Maloney, and Manrakhan 2007). Our data reveals that the more one appreciates these varying degrees of localness from what Relph (1976) terms gradations of total 'outsidedness' isolation to complete 'existential insidedness' immersion within hometown, the more able and likely one will gain access to otherwise-hidden local business networks, information flows, and resources. This was deemed as valuable for localized B2B and B2C transactions; the 'traditional' feel garnered amongst the locally born and bred dominant population provides a sense of security and attachment not present in communities or neighbourhoods with large-scale and/or transient populations. This finding not only stresses the significance of temporality and duration of residence, concepts often emphasized in place attachment literature (Gustafson 2001; Lewicka 2011), but also elaborates how this perceived localness can further fortify cultural conformity through networks of close social relations, family, and co-ethnic ties (Alsos, Carter, and Ljunggren 2014). This, in turn, increases access to contextual opportunities (Müller and Korsgaard 2018), utilizing unique local resources, and aiding the likelihood of success.

Our contribution thus illuminates how home and acts of homemaking are inherently political. It offers a nuanced lens that reveals how entrepreneurial action shapes and is shaped by place, exposing the complex interplay of resources, power relations, and subject positions (Relph 1976). Most importantly, it illustrates how, in conjunction with return migration through the boomerang effect, such localness is reinforced rather than diluted. This reflects the

mundane yet significant micro-politics that construct and are constructed by place dynamics (Dacin et al. 2024; Welter et al. 2017). This polymorphic dynamic renewal recognizes that places are made of many layers (Dacin et al. 2024) and is encapsulated here in a processual model of hometown entrepreneurship (see Figure 2). Our model advances the literature by providing unique insights into entrepreneurial ‘stability-within-movement’ in a peripheral urban area (Sheller and Urry 2006). It illustrates diverse migration pathways and how commitment to a hometown signifies an active entrepreneurial experience, variably worked on to confer value, and critically, for whom this value is created.

Following the renewed exploration of home’s ‘darker side’ (Gurney 2020), our contribution adds another dimension to the entrepreneurship literature uncoupling hometown from positive affect (Lewicka 2011). In this vein, we observe the imperative of entrepreneurs developing trust in non-core contexts (Kimmitt et al. 2024), uncovering (often-overlooked) negative implications of local social capital. Masked in a rhetoric of local pride and contributions to the local economy, such entrepreneurial storytelling often dictates solutions to assumed public needs, neglecting those more marginalized groups. This unveils the exclusionary nature in which hometown can be appropriated at the city/town scale to protect residents and their traditional way of life, thus obstructing competition and churn of firms. Unlike the liabilities of foreignness, which focus on the inherent disadvantages faced by foreign firms in a local market (Zaheer 1995), our contribution breaks down the binary distinction of local versus non-local, what this means for entrepreneurial processes, and how one becomes perceived as ‘more’ local by ‘true’ local counterparts in peripheral urban places. By dipping into covert socialized pools of knowledge, such entrepreneurs expand their capabilities and available strategic options, whereas newcomers find their ventures significantly disadvantaged through being excluded from local information flows, business networks, and access to decision-makers (Mayer and Meili 2016). Migrant entrepreneurs thus experience an ambiguous state of ‘outsiderness’, where setting up one’s business in place is an empowering move, yet being sidelined by locals signifies powerlessness. The fixed territorial boundaries of local acceptance shift minimally and are rooted in generational family presence, as shown in the detail view of our model’s cylinder (Figure 2).

We therefore reflect a multifaceted understanding of hometown entrepreneurship, moving beyond the valorization of instrumentally-motivated economic outcomes (Welter et al. 2017;

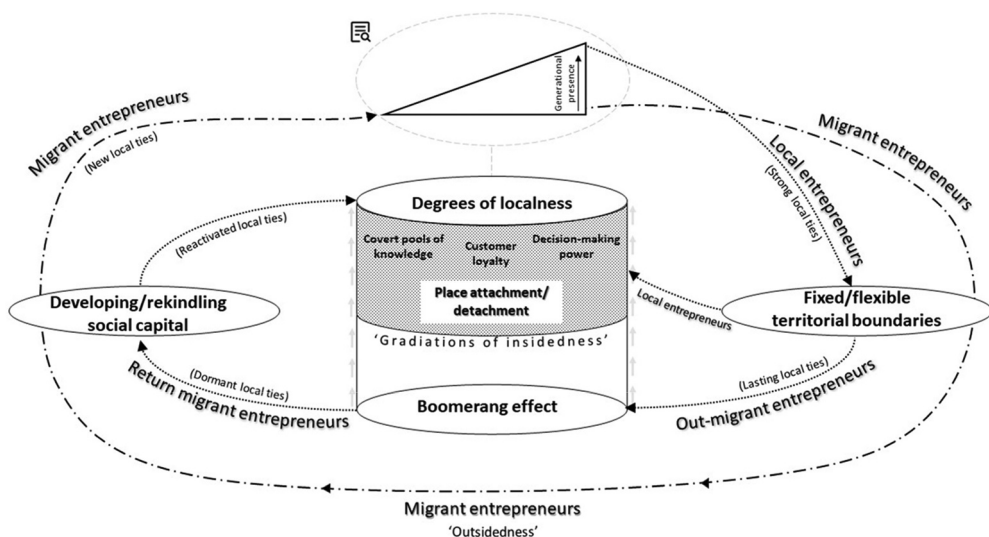


Figure 2. A model of hometown entrepreneurship.

Welter, Baker, and Wirsching 2019) and the oft-seen primacy of gendered entrepreneurial processes occurring within a domicile unit (cf. Carter, Van Auken, and Harms 1992; Hamilton 2013; Mason, Carter, and Tagg 2011). Armed with this enhanced comprehension, migrating entrepreneurs must exercise caution when relying on pre-established external networks and capital reserves as potential safety nets in peripheral urban areas. Our findings suggest that engagement in various institutionally distinct spatial contexts may complicate rather than facilitate, business development in peripheral urban areas, contrary to what most literature assumes (Cuervo-Cazurra, Narula, and Un 2015; Evansluong and Ramirez-Pasillas 2019). Instead, our contribution permits insights into 'doing context' (Welter and Baker 2021), emphasizing how entrepreneurs continually enact and leverage place as a cultural resource to maintain identity, status, and legitimacy within hometown entrepreneurship (Gehman and Soublière 2017; Lounsbury, Gehman, and Glynn 2019) garnering stakeholder support (Kimmitt et al. 2024; Korsgaard, Müller, and Welter 2021). We thus argue that home advantage is not only effective in rural regions (Habersetzer et al. 2021), but also in peripheral urban places, stressing the dynamic nature of people-place relationships that often prioritize moral obligation over economic rationality (McKeever, Jack, and Anderson 2015) and only tentatively endow newcomers with legitimacy.

5.2. The boomerang effect

Second, we present in detail the boomerang effect building block in our model of hometown entrepreneurship (see above). Such effect has been conceptualized in social psychology as a persuasive message which produces an attitude change in the direction opposite to that intended. This conceptualization of a U-turn in thinking has shaped our understanding of the boomerang effect as a reversal in entrepreneurial mobility. It provides nuanced explanations into how returning to one's hometown influences entrepreneurial resource accumulation, mobility, and reintegration into the labour market, thereby enriching our understanding of place-making. Importantly, our findings indicate that the boomerang effect does not simply depict a migration path, but rather signifies converging dynamics where return migrants leverage their degree of localness (depicted as the top and bottom of the cylinder in Figure 2), feeding into a hometown entrepreneurial ecosystem.

Heeding calls for qualitative research in returnee entrepreneurship (Qin, Wright, and Gao 2017) investigating broader migration contexts (Bolzani 2023; Habersetzer et al. 2021; Williams, Plakoyiannaki, and Krasniqi 2023), our consideration of the boomerang effect widens the scholarly understanding of returnee entrepreneurship. We found everyday entrepreneurs wish to return primarily for social, rather than instrumental, motivations – a driver frequently overlooked within returnee entrepreneurship literature (Bolzani 2023; Gruenhagen, Davidsson, and Sawang 2020). Considering that local actors exhibit much more flexibility in their territorial boundaries for return migrants, facilitating their reintegration, such entrepreneurs are much better positioned to capitalize on their degree of localness. This offers a competitive advantage compared to outsiders who struggle to penetrate these tightly knit and established networks (Habersetzer et al. 2021; Mayer and Meili 2016). Consequently, it offers a sophisticated understanding of their rediscovered sense of belonging and reluctance to relocate, even when more favourable opportunities arise. We therefore confirm that hometown is intricately linked to a territorial sense of belonging and socialization for both locals and returnees which aids entrepreneurship (Dahl and Sorenson 2012; Figueiredo, Guimarães, and Woodward 2002; Stam 2007). This helps explain regional entrepreneurial disparities; appreciating how historical cyclical migration, contextual variations, and powerful social ties influence entrepreneurial intentions provides deeper insight into an area's vibrancy and propensity for enterprise (Audretsch et al. 2012; Lin et al. 2019; Xavier Molina-Morales and Teresa Martínez-Fernández 2006).

Our contribution also broadens the understanding of returning to one's hometown to undertake enterprise (Evansluong and Ramirez-Pasillas 2019; Sundararajan and Sundararajan

2015) beyond those self-initiated elites pursuing economic progress upon reintegration (Battistella 2018; Drori, Honig, and Wright 2009; Gruenhagen, Davidsson, and Sawang 2020). We highlight how hometown interrelates with migration, illustrating how place acts as a symbolic and social locale where networks bind or sideline individuals into the social context (Kimmitt et al. 2024). This adds a new dimension to the returnee entrepreneurship literature which largely investigates mobility between under-resourced home countries and more economically developed host countries (Dana et al. 2020; Gruenhagen, Davidsson, and Sawang 2020). We afford greater insights into how and why everyday entrepreneurs reactivate dormant ties (Lin et al. 2019; Williams, Plakoyiannaki, and Krasniqi 2023) showing that network decay progresses more slowly in peripheral urban areas. This enables geographically distant ties to endure and influence not only returnee resource acquisition but also the notion of hometown entrepreneurship itself.

To this extent, we conceptually advance the instrumentally rigid leave-learn-return perspective put forth in returnee entrepreneurship literature (Gruenhagen, Davidsson, and Sawang 2020). We instead argue for reconceptualizing this process through a detach-experience-revalue perspective, enhancing our understanding of hometown returnee entrepreneurship. This therefore adds to migration literature which is inconsistent (Battistella 2018; Lin et al. 2019) and tends to be dominated by counterurbanisation failing to consider the return migration experience (Coulter, Ham, and Findlay 2016) and its effects on place-making. Our contribution thus depicts hometown as a crucial and evolving symbolic resource, demonstrating how individuals and organizations employ place-based cultural resources for legitimation and identity work – an aspect seldom explored in existing literature (Dacin et al. 2024; Kimmitt et al. 2024). This challenges the conventional notion that static boundedness is what ties individuals to place (Sheller and Urry 2006) advocating instead for integrating local context with return migration to understand entrepreneurs' micro-level processes (Hagan and Wassink 2020; Wang 2020). Moving beyond an economic or political focus (Bolzani 2023; Gruenhagen, Davidsson, and Sawang 2020), we position this form of returnee entrepreneurship not necessarily as a long-term business strategy, but rather as a socio-cultural territorial reintegration process that builds human capital and inspires entrepreneurial intentions, harnessing one's localness, and boosting hometowns' development.

5.3. Implications for practice and policy

Our third contribution focuses on the micro-politics of entrepreneurship grounded in place; we provide key practice and policy insights for fostering micro, small, and medium enterprise (MSME) vibrancy and place-making in non-core contexts experiencing cyclical migration. By moving beyond romanticized versions of home laden with positive affect (Lewicka 2011), we offer a nuanced understanding that affirms the significance of place to our daily lives, organizations, and communities (Dacin et al. 2024). This perspective actively shows that hometown can act as an asset, liability, or both, depending on an individual's experience and migratory pathway, thereby challenging the perceived uniformity within a locality as often portrayed in the literature. This enables us to appreciate how diverse entrepreneurs 'do' and feel home (Gurney 1997), uncovering routinized regional regimes and how social ties to peripheral urban hometowns can transcend time and space (Audretsch et al. 2012). Additionally, it challenges the view of place as a 'regional container' for entrepreneurial activities by recognizing places as dynamic concepts bridging the material and symbolic (Gieryn 2000; Kimmitt et al. 2024). Hometown thus acts as a double-edged sword in the peripheral entrepreneurial ecosystem: it drives entrepreneurship but may foster ethnocentrism restricting opportunities for diverse migrants, while also buffering against chains and multinationals invading and overwhelming peripheral urban places.

Exploring the nuances of oppression and resistance in a politicized understanding of home permits unique policy insights into the continuous renewal and dynamism of peripheral urban places. The aversion to outsiders can make these areas feel less open and diverse, potentially

harming economic productivity. Obstructing newcomers reduces local entrepreneurial activity and competition, overlooking the potential of such individuals as change agents who can overcome social challenges (Redhead and Bika 2022). We contend that policymakers should acknowledge the significant role of family and community for hometown entrepreneurship, but with caution. Policy cannot simply be transposed from fast-growing economies dominated by clustering effects and returnee-focused policies, often neglecting peripheral urban places (Rodríguez-Pose, Terrero-Dávila, and Lee 2023).

We argue policymakers should consider fostering diverse activities that encourage growth. This necessitates exploring more patient forms of capital depending on venture development stages (Kimmitt et al. 2024) alongside targeted public spending on 'outsiders'. Focusing on asset-based community development can also strengthen local social infrastructure, particularly amid a crisis in community and belonging among younger generations (Norfolk Community Foundation 2023). This can be achieved by drawing insights from successful policies in other nations that connect returnees with local and migrant entrepreneurs to fill knowledge or expertise gaps in hometowns. For instance, the Kalihi Valley Instructional Bike Exchange in Honolulu, Hawaii integrates cultural traditions into leadership training and mentoring, fostering community cohesion and addressing challenges faced by residents where 40% are immigrants. Such initiatives accentuate the importance of tailored approaches emphasizing that a 'one size fits all' strategy is unlikely to be effective. Supporting both outsiders with venture development whilst targeting returnees to their hometown region can build on a greater *all-round* wealth of experience alongside pre-existing stocks of local social capital. This presents an alternative solution to the now rising intra-regional disparities (Brown and Cowling 2021; Pike et al. 2024) in which the biographies of entrepreneurs may prove to be more influential than agglomeration forces.

Our contribution's relevance is underscored by its alignment with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 8, 9, 10, and 11, addressing sustainable growth and socio-spatial inequalities. Our data shows that the aversion to outsiders and lack of churn within such hometown environments can foster issues such as loneliness and social exclusion, highlighting the importance of addressing societal grand challenges through entrepreneurship (Lounsbury, Gehman, and Glynn 2019). Indeed, Norwich has multiple wards in the highest quintile nationally for loneliness, signifying the urgent need for interventions, as it correlates with significant health risks and educational impacts (Norfolk Community Foundation 2023). Our contributions should therefore not be dismissed as commonplace or mundane as they are crucial for economic growth, societal change (Welter et al. 2017), and sustainable place-making (Dacin et al. 2024), understanding the importance of place in daily life beyond shocks and crises (Brown and Cowling 2021; Kimmitt et al. 2024).

These insights are increasingly pertinent given declining entrepreneurship rates (Haltiwanger 2022), the longstanding underuse of regeneration funds, the eradication of the levelling up 'gimmick' (BBC 2024), and the end of 'the age of the unicorn' (The Economist 2024). Greater attention to place-making and leveraging for entrepreneurship in non-core regions thus becomes pivotal (Kimmitt et al. 2024; Pike et al. 2024; Rodríguez-Pose, Terrero-Dávila, and Lee 2023). This necessitates a re-evaluation of urban and regional development policies, particularly in the UK context of county devolution deals that transfer significant powers and funding to local governments, empowering regions to harness their development potential (Rodríguez-Pose, Terrero-Dávila, and Lee 2023).

5.4. Future research

Our study expands the intricate relationship between hometown and entrepreneurship while identifying crucial avenues for future research. There is a pressing need for further empirical investigations that adopt a comparative approach across different temporal and spatial contexts. Such studies could expand our understanding of how diverse forms of home

interact with entrepreneurial activities, particularly in transient places and other non-core regions, to gain a more holistic model of hometown entrepreneurship. Insights from post-humanist perspectives could enrich these studies by emphasizing inclusivity and ecological concerns, thereby countering the 'diabolical double crisis' by elucidating interconnectedness within hometown entrepreneurship ecosystems (Donald and Gray 2019). This line of inquiry can offer valuable insights into entrepreneurial practices and their role in sustainable place-making.

Additionally, future research should examine the decline in entrepreneurship rates alongside under-explored place-sensitive concepts like a territorial sense of belonging and place-making, and their implications for regional development and economic resilience. There is a need to focus on broader contexts of migration e.g. analysing how the length of time individuals spend away from their hometown influences their territorial reintegration and resource utilization. Within this body of work, understanding the interactions of diverse coexisting actors in creatively constructing and reconstructing place for enterprise is crucial. Theoretically examining the necessary conditions that define an urban area as a hometown and how these perceptions influence entrepreneurial activities, local economic growth, and societal change, especially in overlooked regions, is also imperative in light of the UK's recent political changes. Amidst these empirical and theoretical lines of future investigation, we also suggest, methodologically speaking, that implementing our integrative critical incident technique across different contexts could greatly enhance our understanding of key occurrences impacting MSMEs.

6. Conclusions

In this paper, we address notable gaps in the literature by exploring the interplay between mobility, everyday enterprise, and return migration, emphasizing variability in hometown entrepreneurship (Welter, Baker, and Wirsching 2019). Contrary to the assumption that 'home advantage is only effective in rural regions' (Habersetzer et al. 2021, 944), we demonstrate that degrees of localness complicate the local versus non-local binary, distinctly impacting entrepreneurial dynamics and uncovering the 'darker side' of home (Gurney 2020). Our more socialized model of hometown entrepreneurship (see Figure 2) challenges the instrumentally rigid leave-learn-return narrative, highlighting return migration as a complex detach-experience-revalue socio-cultural reconnection which feeds into the local entrepreneurial ecosystem. This offers 'a strong theoretical framework for exploring the interrelation of spatial context and entrepreneurship' (Müller and Korsgaard 2018, 247) and moves us beyond traditional economic models. By examining the coexistence of diverse actors in peripheral urban hometowns, we provide insights into regional development while uncovering the complex experiential meaning of home for entrepreneurs. This enriches our understanding of hometown entrepreneurship beyond instrumental views prevalent in the literature.

Notes

1. The attribution of quotes regarding the individual voices of the entrepreneurs shall be formatted (pseudonym, age, migration status, occupation, number of employees) herein.
2. The attribution of quotes regarding the collective voice of the secondary sources shall be formatted (dd/mm/yy publication, real name, contextual role) herein.

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Ethics statement

The respondents have been given pseudonyms at all points of reference, with precise and detailed information being omitted to ensure anonymity. Accordingly, ethical approval was granted via the UEA Norwich Business School Research Ethics Subcommittee.

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