

Resilience through Community Building: How Immigrant Small Business Owners in BIAs Adapted to Toronto's COVID-19 Pandemic

Abstract

Small businesses are one of the most vulnerable, at-risk sectors of the economy (Battisti and Deakins, 2012; Ingirige et al., 2008; Pendakur and Pendakur, 1998; Portes and Jensen, 1989; Waldinger, 2003; Waldinger et al., 2000; Yoshida and Smith, 2005). With the onset of COVID-19, the barriers facing immigrant entrepreneurs with small-businesses are two-fold, as they not only face existing barriers experienced by immigrant entrepreneurs, but also barriers faced by small business owners. As such, this paper explores the effects of COVID-19 on small immigrant businesses/ethnic entrepreneurship in the inner-suburbs of Toronto by asking the following questions: How are immigrant small business owners adapting during the COVID-19 pandemic? Using primary and secondary research methods, this paper found that the extent to which an immigrant small business owner was able to adapt their business to the pandemic environment largely depended on (1) the extent to which they were integrated into existing networks in their community, such as local business networks or associations, ethnic networks, and family networks; (2) the place-making methods use by immigrant business owners, such as creating online networks for co-ethnic support and use of the BIA structure; and, (3) the opportunity structures in which a business owner was embedded within, including access to and use of government relief programs, use of online delivery platforms and social media, changing menus, offering discounts, and reducing staffing.

Biography of Author

Jane Law is currently completing her Master of Planning in Urban Development degree at Ryerson University. She is an aspiring urban planner with experience in arts-based community engagement for equity-seeking groups. She completed her Bachelor's degree at the University of Toronto with a specialist in Geography and a major in Urban Studies. She is interested in exploring how engagement processes can be made more creative, approachable, and compelling for people of all abilities and ages. Jane has previous experience working in the role of community engagement with the City of Toronto, the Toronto Youth Food Policy Council, the Toronto Ward Museum, and multiple Business Improvement Areas. Besides planning, you can find Jane participating in zoom ballet class in her basement, taking walks in her neighbourhood, and reading books as part of her family book club.